

HOMES BY THE LEE

HOUSING A FREE STATE CITY, 1922-1942



TADGH QUILL-MANLEY

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STATE CITY, 1922-1942**

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INTRODUCTION

From the early 1920s to the early 1940s, Cork city experienced a period of sustained state-led intervention in housing provision, a process that left an indelible mark on its urban form, and on the lives of thousands of its residents. Over two decades, a series of municipal housing schemes, initiated and managed primarily by Cork Corporation, in co-ordination with central government policy, sought to address an escalating housing crisis rooted in decades of neglect, rapid population growth, and broader socio-economic changes. This fresh text explores the emergence, implementation, and lived experience of these housing schemes, situating them within the wider contexts of post-independence governance, urban planning, and social reform in Ireland.

In the aftermath of the Irish War of Independence and Civil War, the newly established Free State faced a monumental task: to assert its legitimacy through visible, material improvements to the quality of life for its citizens. Nowhere was this more urgent than in the realm of housing. Cork, like several other Irish cities, inherited a severe urban housing problem from its colonial past. The 1910s and early 1920s saw a surge in population combined with decades of underinvestment in working-class housing. The consequential result was a city oft-characterised by overcrowded tenements, dilapidated cottages, and unsanitary conditions, particularly in the older inner-city districts such as Shandon, Barrack Street, and the Marsh.

Contemporary reports from housing inspectors, city engineers, and public health officials described scenes

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of acute deprivation. Entire families lived in single-room dwellings, often without access to clean water, toilets, or proper ventilation. High infant mortality, recurring outbreaks of tuberculosis, and widespread malnutrition were among the several public health consequences of such conditions. These were not isolated pockets of deprivation but were endemic throughout significant portions of the city. Public pressure mounted, and city councillors, along with council management, increasingly recognised the need for an ambitious programme of slum clearance and suburban rehousing.

Legislatively, the Free State government provided the necessary tools. Building upon the existing Housing of the Working Classes (Ireland) Acts, new legislation in the 1920s and 1930s offered financial subsidies to local authorities for the construction of working-class housing. The Housing Acts of 1924, 1925, 1929, and 1932, among others, facilitated the acquisition of land, the funding of construction, and, crucially, the long-term financing of rents through state subventions. These Acts also reflected a shifting vision of the state's role in welfare provision: from a minimal provider of relief to a more interventionist actor tasked with ensuring basic living standards.

Cork Corporation responded with a level of energy and ambition that would permanently reshape the city. Early schemes focused on the immediate rehousing of those displaced by war damage, particularly in the aftermath of the Burning of Cork city in December 1920. Yet, as the 1920s progressed, attention turned toward broader slum clearance and the creation of new housing estates on the peripheries of the city.

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Wycherley, Capwell Road, and Turners Cross were among the first to be developed, followed by larger estates in Gurranabraher, Dillon's Cross, and later, Ballyphehane. These developments signalled a new approach to urban planning, one that sought to disperse the working-class population from the dense inner-city tenements into purpose-built suburban homes.

The architectural and planning principles guiding these schemes were influenced by contemporary European and British models. The 'Garden City' movement, which had taken root in the early twentieth century in Great Britain, left a discernible imprint on Cork city's housing layout, emphasising low-density development, green spaces, and clearly delineated residential zones. The homes built were generally semi-detached or terraced, with private gardens, multiple rooms, and internal sanitation, being a radical improvement for families accustomed to one-room tenements. Streets were often wide and tree-lined, creating a more open and healthier urban environment.

Yet the implementation of these schemes was not without its tensions and contradictions. While the state aimed to improve living standards, the rehousing process also involved significant displacement, social reorganisation, and, in some cases, the breaking apart of long-established communities. Moving from the city centre to new suburban estates often meant a disconnection from existing social networks, places of employment, and communal services. For some residents, the transition brought a sense of isolation, particularly in the early years when amenities such as shops, schools, and churches were still being developed.

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Furthermore, eligibility criteria for the new homes often privileged families deemed "respectable" by the local officials, typically those with stable incomes, large families, or veterans of the War of Independence. This approach sometimes left the most marginalised residents, including the unemployed, unmarried mothers, and the elderly, with limited access to new housing. The schemes, while progressive in many respects, thus reproduced certain social hierarchies and moral judgements embedded within broader Irish society at the time.

Religious and political ideologies also played a formative role in shaping both policy and perception. Catholic social teaching, with its emphasis on the sanctity of the family and the moral value of home ownership or stable tenancy, informed many of the debates surrounding housing policy. At the same time, the nascent Free State's desire to distinguish itself from British rule meant placing a high symbolic value on the provision of decent homes for Irish families as part of a broader project of national regeneration. Housing was not merely a technical matter of bricks and mortar; it was bound up with ideas of citizenship, morality, and the shaping of a new social order.

This book explores these developments through a combination of archival research, spatial analysis, and oral history. Drawing on city council minutes, architectural plans, census data, and first-hand accounts from residents, it reconstructs the story of how social housing was imagined, constructed, and inhabited in Cork during these formative years. Each chapter focuses on a specific aspect of the process: from the political debates that shaped funding and design

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decisions, to the lived experience of families who moved into the new estates.

Attention is given not only to the physical structures but also to the social dynamics that emerged within them. How did the move to suburban housing affect women's roles within the household and community? What forms of neighbourliness, co-operation, or conflict arose in these new environments? How did residents navigate the expectations imposed by landlords, city officials, and church authorities? By addressing these questions, the book seeks to provide a comprehensive account of social housing not simply as a policy intervention, but as a lived and contested social reality.

In focusing on Cork city, this study also aims to complement the primarily Dublin-focused perspective that has often dominated Irish housing historiography. Cork city's experience offers valuable insights into the diversity of local responses to national policy frameworks, and into the ways in which housing served as a medium for negotiating the promises and limitations of Irish independence. While many of the same legislative instruments and ideological undercurrents were at play across the country, their application in Cork reveals distinct patterns shaped by the city's geography, political culture, as well as its administrative capacity.

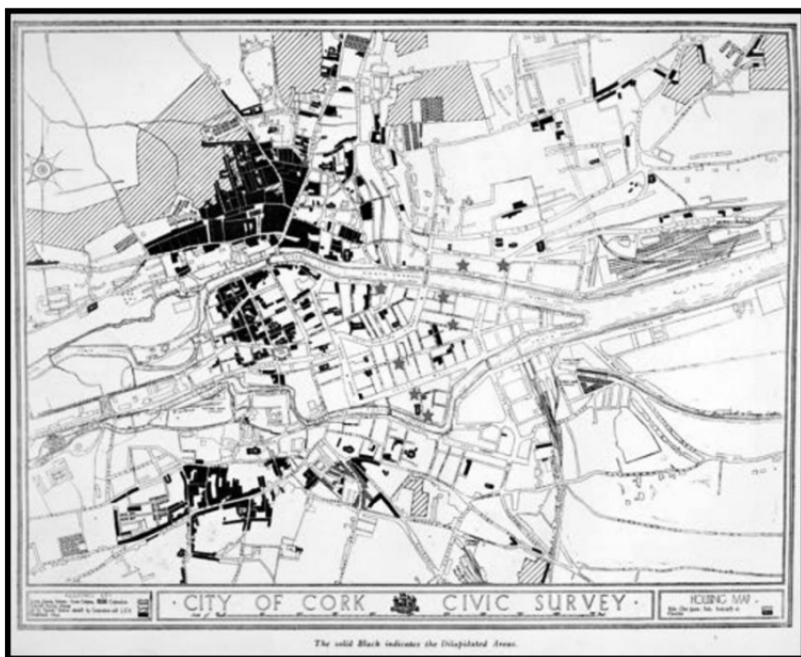
Moreover, Cork city provides a compelling case study in the long-term impact of early social housing. Many of the estates built in this period remain integral parts of the city's housing stock today, still home to generations of families, and still reflective of the aspirations and compromises of the era in which they were built. The

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legacy of these developments can be seen not only in the physical layout of the city but in its social memory, its patterns of community life, and its ongoing debates about housing, class, and the role of the state.

Ultimately, this book, titled '*Homes by the Lee: Housing a Free State City, 1922-1942*,' argues that the story of social housing in Cork city between the 1920s and 1940s is a story of ambition and adaptation, of a city and a state attempting to redefine themselves in the wake of upheaval, through the most intimate and material of means: the home. By placing housing at the centre of our understanding of Cork city's twentieth-century history, we gain a deeper appreciation of the ways in which policy, planning, and everyday life intersected to shape both the built environment and the people who inhabited it.

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A map from the year 1915 highlighting the prevalence of slums in Cork City, prior to the housing projects that would occur in subsequent decades.

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THE FIRST DECADE, 1922-1932

At a January 1922 Cork Corporation committee meeting, discussing the topic of “Working-Class Dwellings,” Councillor J. Allen presided, and the following members were also in attendance: Alderman Coughlan, Messrs. T. Forde, P. O’Sullivan, J. Good, and J. Barry. The committee spent most of the meeting reviewing applications for housing from individuals suffering from overcrowding in their current homes. In one case, four individuals were living in one room, while in another, ten people were sleeping in a different room. In yet another situation, it was highlighted that a couple of adults of both sexes were sharing the same room. A further case described an applicant living with his father-in-law and two married couples, with a brother and sister-in-law occupying an attic room as sleeping quarters. It was agreed to prioritise housing for those applicants in the most dire situations. Alderman Coughlan raised attention to a social housing scheme implemented by the Dublin Corporation, which allowed tenants to become homeowners. He suggested that it was a very good idea, as it would encourage tenants to take better care of their homes and save the Corporation money. It was decided, on the motion of Councillor Forde, to write to the Dublin Corporation for further details about the scheme.¹

A special meeting of the Cork Corporation was held one evening to deliberate on a series of motions previously submitted by a city councillor. Chief among these was a proposal that the Corporation embark on a municipal housing scheme involving the construction of

¹ *Cork Examiner* 4/1/1922

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no fewer than 120 houses, at a total estimated cost not exceeding £112,000. This initiative was to be carried out in line with a circular dated 16 March 1922, issued by the Minister for Local Government on behalf of the Provisional Government. According to the proposal, the Corporation would strike a rate of one shilling in the pound on the Improvement Rate for housing purposes for the financial year beginning 1 April 1922. This rate was to be collected in two instalments—one by 30 September 1922 and the second by 31 March 1923. It was projected that this rate would yield approximately £9,300 for that financial year. In addition, the Corporation would apply to both the Minister and the Leinster Bank Ltd. for a loan of £23,000 to fund the project. The proposed loan would be repayable over a maximum of ten years, and bear interest at a rate half a point below the prevailing Irish bank rate.

Furthermore, in accordance with the aforementioned government circular, the Corporation intended to seek a government grant of £71,200—equivalent to twice the total amount to be raised through the rate and the loan. The motions also included an application to the Local Government Board for formal approval of the loan, which would be secured against city revenues.

It was proposed that a committee be established, comprising one representative from each electoral area, to advise on site selection, layout plans, housing design, and cost estimates. A special council meeting would then be convened to review the committee's report once completed. During the meeting, the Acting Town Clerk read aloud the circular from the Provisional Government regarding the funding framework for housing schemes.

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The Acting Town Clerk outlined the financial calculations underpinning the scheme. The estimated gross revenue from the improvement rate was £10,674 15s. A rate of one shilling in the pound would yield £9,333 14s 9d. Combined with the loan and the government contribution, the total funding would amount to £112,004 17s, just under the projected cost of £112,500 for 150 houses at £750 each. The Lord Mayor recalled that several weeks earlier, when housing funds were being discussed, he had contacted the Ministry to inquire whether a grant would be available for Cork or whether a national housing scheme was imminent. Receiving no confirmation, he asked whether the Ministry would support a locally initiated scheme through a temporary loan. After a delay of several weeks, he received a reply stating that no national scheme or state aid was currently available. Subsequently, he and several councillors discussed the matter with the Minister and agreed to seek a direct loan, with the understanding that should a national housing programme later materialise, the loan would be retrospectively included under its terms. The Lord Mayor emphasised the importance of avoiding the kind of mismanagement also seen in the Patrick Street development, and went on to stress the need for clear communication with authorities in Dublin regarding the availability of funding. If funds were forthcoming, the Corporation would proceed; if not, they would move ahead independently.

Councillor John Horgan questioned whether the ten-year loan term was imposed by the Provisional Government or by the banks. The City Solicitor confirmed that it was a condition set by the banks, who

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were unwilling to extend loans for longer periods. Councillor Egan remarked that a house would last far longer than ten years and urged efforts to secure a longer repayment term, noting the Corporation's broader financial commitments. The Lord Mayor responded that the circular explicitly referred to a short-term loan and suggested that a shorter term might ultimately benefit the Corporation. Horgan objected that placing the entire burden on one generation of ratepayers was unfair. The Lord Mayor replied that the loan was relatively modest in comparison to the overall funding, most of which would come through the grant.

Councillor Barry seconded the Lord Mayor's motion, while Councillor Nolan proposed an amendment to increase the number of houses to 150, and raise the estimated cost to £168,000. He also recommended increasing the rate to one and a half shillings in the pound. Additionally, he suggested that applications be made to the Minister and both the Leinster Bank and the National Land Bank—whichever institution offered more favourable loan conditions. Alderman Egan expressed hope that the proposal would not be dismissed on the assumption that the Corporation was failing in its duty. Sir John H. Scott warned that any delay caused by such amendments could hinder progress and praised the original motion as a strong start to the initiative.²

An interesting discussion unfolded during a meeting of the Cork Corporation Council regarding the housing scheme, particularly focusing on a previous decision to build 68 houses on the Wycherley site. Although tenders

² *Evening Echo* 28/3/1922

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were due to be considered at the meeting, no tenders had been submitted. The minutes from a special Housing Committee meeting held on May 25th outlined the following:

1. Minister's Approval: A letter from the Minister for Local Government was read, approving the Corporation's proposal to borrow £12,750 from the Munster and Leinster Bank Ltd., to fund the construction of the 68 houses on the Wycherley site. This loan was to be repaid in 15 years at an interest rate of 4.5%. Additionally, it was approved that £4,250 of this amount be raised from local rates. The Minister also approved house plans, layout designs, and specifications, subject to certain modifications.
2. Dublin Corporation Update: A letter was read from the Town Clerk of Dublin, which outlined how, under an agreement with the Dublin Building Trades Guild, 25 houses had already been erected, and 58 more had been handed over to the Guild for construction. A deputation from the Guild explained the conditions under which it worked on the Dublin housing schemes. It was decided to reserve ten of the houses for construction by the Guild, following the Dublin model.

At the meeting, a letter from the South of Ireland Builders' Association, dated June 1st, was read aloud. The letter stated that the Association would not submit tenders for the Wycherley site if the Corporation accepted tenders from contractors who were not members of the Association or similar groups. However, the Association indicated that its members

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would submit tenders if the Cork Building Guild was allowed to act as a bona fide contractor, subject to the same conditions as other members.

Alderman O'Sullivan responded, arguing that the letter was an attempt to dictate terms to the Corporation and that the Corporation had no right to differentiate between groups. He stressed that the Corporation received rates from both builders and labourers and that the Cork Building Guild, which had proposed completing the work and sharing half the profits with the Corporation, should not be hindered. He called for an immediate advertisement to seek tenders for roadwork, sewers, and drains on the Wycherley site. Mr. Barry, representing the Cork Building Guild, detailed the arrangement where ten houses had been reserved for the Guild under the Dublin Corporation's scheme, which had benefited from £2,500 in funding. He said that the Guild was willing to take on the entire Wycherley scheme if no other contractors came forward. He also stated that the Guild was guaranteed against any losses by the Corporation. He expressed regret over the Builders' Association's stance, but insisted that the Guild was prepared to prove its ability to complete the work satisfactorily. Councillor Allen questioned whether the Builders' Association in Dublin had taken action in response to the Guild's involvement in that city. Mr. Barry explained that, in the city of Dublin, the Builders' Association and the Guild had worked on different parts of the same scheme. Councillor Day seconded Alderman O'Sullivan's motion, condemning the Builders' Association's attempt to dictate terms and urging the Corporation to firmly stand against it. He expressed support for the Guild,

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stating they were prepared to build the houses and ensure no financial loss to the Corporation.

Mr. B. Murphy supported the resolution, highlighting the discrepancy between the Cork Builders' Federation and the Dublin approach. He mentioned that the Employers' Federation had been attempting to hold discussions with workers' representatives regarding wages but had failed to organise such meetings. He criticised the builders for attempting to suppress competition and creating the building shortage in Cork. In response to the Chairman, Mr. Barry confirmed that the Guild had submitted an estimate for the work and that, if the estimate was deemed too high, the City Engineer could compare it to another estimate. The meeting continued with the Council deliberating on the best course of action, given the challenges presented by the Builders' Association and the Cork Building Guild's offer. The focus remained on ensuring the housing scheme moved forward and met the urgent needs of the community.³

An opinion piece highlighted that the second meeting of Cork Corporation took place concerning the layout of roads, sewers, and water mains for the Wycherley site, and to consider the report of the Special Housing Committee on tenders received for the associated housing scheme, revived hopes that the construction of homes for the city's working classes might proceed on a sensible and sustainable basis. It was hoped that an arrangement could be reached regarding construction costs, so that the new homes could be let at rents affordable to those they were meant to house, without

³ *Evening Echo* 10/6/1922

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placing an additional burden on already heavily taxed ratepayers. A contract for the layout of the Wycherley site had been approved at £8,000. This undoubtedly essential preliminary work was expected to commence immediately, providing employment to many who were out of work at the time. However, the actual cost of constructing the houses remained unresolved. There was hope that the cost could be reduced to the figure of £750 per house, which was similar to the costs of comparable working-class housing in Dublin.

The text suggested that, to the average observer, it was difficult to understand why housing construction should be more expensive in Cork than in Dublin. Imported building materials, it was argued, ought to be no dearer in Cork than in the capital, since much of the required material still needed to be brought in from abroad despite talk of supporting Irish industry. With similar access to markets, it was believed that Cork contractors should enjoy the same purchasing power as their Dublin counterparts. Moreover, Cork's own labourers and craftsmen were considered just as capable and diligent as those in Dublin. Therefore, the cost of labour should not have varied significantly between the two cities. If that assumption held true, the abnormally high estimates in Cork must have stemmed from other sources. Basic materials such as bricks and mortar—especially if sourced locally using Cork lime, sand, and Irish slates—should not have contributed to inflated costs. In fact, such local sourcing ought to have reduced them. Timber, ironwork, and other imported items also arrived directly to the quays in Cork and should not have cost more than similar goods landed in Dublin.

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If the cost of either domestic or imported materials was higher in Cork, the article noted that the public were keen to know why. From a common-sense perspective, many could not see any justification for homes built under the Corporation scheme in Cork city costing more than similar dwellings in Dublin. No satisfactory explanation had yet been offered for this discrepancy. The comparison became even more stark when considering that similar houses were being built in England for less than half the cost of those in Dublin. It was also claimed that the tenders received in Cork were, for all practical purposes, prohibitively high. No responsible municipal body could reasonably proceed with a housing scheme that would require weekly rents of £1 or more from working-class tenants.

At the previous Corporation meeting, it was indicated that the Cork Builders' Association might enter the process with genuine competitive tenders. The City Engineer stated that such competition could lead to a significant reduction in construction costs. It was generally hoped that this would be the case, and the public awaited developments with keen interest. Cork builders, as depicted, were seen as shrewd and capable businesspeople, and the stark price difference between Cork and Dublin was perceived as a poor reflection on the city—especially since the working conditions and materials available were otherwise comparable.

Furthermore, it was suggested that it was only fair to acknowledge that members of Cork Corporation were just as dissatisfied with the original tenders as the majority of ratepayers. Indeed, no reasonable person could have supported a scheme that would result in tenants paying up to £50 or £60 per year in rent.

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Following discussion of the architects' and engineers' reports, it was agreed that the original specifications would be revised and new tenders invited. It was noted during the discussion that, given the current wage levels, many tradesmen and labourers were struggling to survive. That supposed fact only underscored the supposed absurdity of a plan which, had it gone forward, would have produced "affordable" housing that was unaffordable to its intended residents. The revised plans, specifications, and forthcoming advertisements for new tenders were expected to produce a more workable solution and, hopefully, allow this much-needed housing scheme to proceed in earnest.⁴

Contractors had been invited to submit tenders for the construction of dwelling houses at the Wycherley site on College Road. The work was to be carried out in accordance with plans and specifications prepared by the architectural firm of W. H. Hill, Son and Flanagan, based at 28 South Mall, Cork. Drawings and specifications were made available for inspection at the architects' offices. Copies of the Bills of Quantities could be obtained from the same office upon payment of £1. This fee was refundable upon the submission of a genuine tender. All tenders were to be completed on the prescribed form, accompanied by priced Bills of Quantities, and submitted in sealed envelopes clearly marked "Tender for Wycherley Site Housing Scheme."⁵

In October 1922, Cork Corporation held a special meeting to review a report from a deputation that had

⁴ *Cork Examiner* 10/7/1922

⁵ *Cork Examiner* 2/8/1922

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recently met with the Housing Department of the Government. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the possibility of reducing the cost per house for the 68 houses being constructed on the Wycherley site, following tenders submitted by the Irish Development Company.

The Town Clerk read a report summarising the discussions from a conference in Dublin held on September 20th. The meeting was attended by several key city representatives, including Alderman Sean O'Sullivan, Councillor Barry M. Egan, and various housing department officials and contractors. The aim of the conference was to explore ways to reduce costs for the housing project, which had previously received tenders from contractors. The contractors had submitted a list of 60 items for potential reductions or omissions, while the Housing Department proposed 40 items for consideration. After thorough discussion and careful examination, both lists were revised to create a new list that met the criteria of reducing costs while still maintaining the size and accommodation of the houses. Some items were eliminated or modified, resulting in a reduction of £117 per house. The key modifications featured:

1. **Ground Level Adjustments:** Instead of raising the houses on costly walling and filling over the road level, the houses would be built on the natural slope of the ground.
2. **Flooring:** Tiled floors were to be replaced with red-coloured cement surfaces.
3. **Pathways:** Gravel paths in front of houses instead of concrete ones.

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4. Interior Features: Linen presses, baths, and hot water services were omitted from the plans.

As a result of these changes, the revised contract amount for the project is £42,194. The government will contribute £23,002, leaving the Corporation liable for £14,031. The modifications would lead to a total reduction of approximately £8,055.

The meeting then shifted to discussing progress on other city projects. Mr. J. Kelleher raised concerns about the delay in advertising for plans regarding the rebuilding of City Hall and the Free Library, noting that three weeks had passed since the Council's decision but no advertisement had been issued. The City Engineer responded, explaining that he had been busy but had communicated with the President of the Institute of Architects to secure an assessor for the competition. He had received confirmation and would submit the letter to the Council soon. Mr. Kelleher expressed dissatisfaction, feeling that the order had not been fulfilled promptly. Alderman O'Sullivan suggested that the City Engineer would benefit from additional help to manage the volume of work, particularly with the reconstruction of Patrick Street and other housing projects. He acknowledged that individual members of the Council often tasked the Engineer with smaller jobs, consuming time that could be better spent on larger projects. Mr. Kelleher pointed out that the Engineer should have requested extra help if needed. The City Engineer also clarified that the approximate rent for the new houses would be 10s to 11s per week. Sir John Scott expressed concern that this amount might be too high for working-class tenants, with the Chairman

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agreeing that the Government had a significant role in the decision-making process.

A motion to adopt the report was moved by Alderman Coughlan and seconded by Alderman O'Sullivan, with Mr. D. Horgan supporting it. During this discussion, Sir John Scott objected to the elimination of the bathroom in the house plans, considering it essential for health and well-being. However, Mr. Barry Egan clarified that the issue was not the elimination of the bathroom, but rather the omission of the bath and hot water service. Tenants would still be able to install a bath if desired. Sir John Scott reiterated his concern about the numerous revisions to the plans, questioning why the initial designs, which had been far beyond the Corporation's budget, were not kept under the City Engineer's control. He emphasised that the plans should have been developed with the city Corporation's financial constraints in mind. In conclusion, Mr. Egan reassured the Council that the revised plans were now in line with the Government's requirements, and the revised cost structure would allow the housing project to proceed without compromising essential aspects of the design. However, there were ongoing concerns about balancing the needs of the tenants with the financial realities of the project.⁶

In December 1922, the '*Cork Examiner*' published a feature article on planning by J. Delany, the City Engineer. It covered a variety of topics in relation to urban development. He suggested that the following ought to be undertaken in the city:

⁶ *Cork Examiner* 7/10/1922

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- Some 2,500 houses to be built on well-chosen sites, with roads, sewers, water supply, and light (these are urgently required);
- The city should be cleared of slums and house-congested jungles.

Since housing formed part of the welfare and public health efforts within the city's "progressive movement," and was finally beginning to receive the attention it deserved, he believed it appropriate to highlight the views he had presented in his 1918 housing report to the Corporation. In his view, any attempt to improve housing conditions needed to begin with those involved gaining as thorough an understanding as possible of the nature and scale of the issue. To that end, he outlined the following items as a proposed framework for the systematic collection of relevant data:

- An accurate descriptive survey and an explanatory map of all existing defective property: (a) tenements, (b) cottages, (c) residences in advanced condition of deterioration, (d) obstructive buildings, narrow lanes, cul-de-sacs, courts, squares;
- Outline of suggestive schemes for carrying out renovation work on tenements and cottages pronounced unsanitary and unfit for habitation;
- An accurate census of all persons or families most in need of improved accommodation, with a view to their being re-housed in a systematic way;
- An exhaustive investigation into sites and the preparation of a map showing the land considered suitable both within and outside the borough;
- Investigation of the possibilities of the Clearance of Insanitary Areas (a) with a view of reducing over-crowding, (b) reducing house density, (c) laying out air

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spaces in dense districts, (d) making approaches and new streets for better transit through city, and (d) improvements in local amenity;

- Schedule and map the derelict areas of the city and prepare a scheme for laying them out as open spaces, or, where large enough and otherwise suitable, arrange for the erection of small lots of houses;
- Investigation into the possibilities and desirability for action in the city under the various acts of parliament which contain provisions for housing and sanitary improvement;
- A full inquiry into the possibilities for private enterprise in housing in the city and a conference with existing housing companies, would-be promoters of enterprise, building contractors, and individual house-building speculators;
- A report on the inducements which the corporation can offer to private enterprise, and in how far it can assist private promoters by representations to the state departments concerned;
- A scheme of procedure for expediting the legal process for enforcing compliance with the bylaws by owners of insanitary, dangerous, and obstructive property;
- Scheme for urbanising the fringe of the city where land is appropriately situated, by developing access roads, etc, to sites.
- Setting back and improving obtrusive building lines;
- Suggestive schemes for the widening of narrow streets.

He recognised that, wherever sites were chosen for housing development, whether within the city or beyond, it would be inevitable that the layout of streets and access routes would need to be planned, and that in

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some densely populated areas, and the removal of obstructive or undesirable surroundings might also be necessary. With this in mind, he suggested that it might be prudent to examine the extent to which town planning could be seen as beneficial for Cork, with a view to its future enhancement and more thoughtful development.⁷

In late December, the City Solicitor informed the meeting that the Minister of Finance had instructed the City Treasurer that Messrs. Robertson, Ledlie, Ferguson and Co., and Messrs. Cahill and Co., were no longer to be paid. These two firms had begun rebuilding, relying on the housing scheme, but had not yet secured the benefits of it. The Solicitor also noted that Messrs. Grant were likely in the same situation. The Chairman remarked that this was a very serious statement.⁸

The Cork Corporation, at their March monthly meeting, accepted the tender of Mr John Murphy of North Abbey Street, Cork, for the erection of 40 houses on the site of the old Cattle Market, at a cost of £26,163. Only one other tender was received, and the figure quoted was £35,403.⁹

A special meeting of the Committee of the whole Council of Cork Corporation was held to discuss a letter from the Ministry of Local Government regarding the rents for houses in the Wycherley Housing Scheme. The Deputy Lord Mayor presided

⁷ *Cork Examiner* 18/12/1922

⁸ *Cork Examiner* 23/12/1922

⁹ *Cork Examiner* 30/3/1923

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over the meeting. The Town Clerk read a letter from the Ministry of Local Government, which included two key proposals for consideration. The first suggestion was that the Corporation consider selling the houses for cash, which could free up funds for further housing projects. This was presented as the preferred option. The second proposal, in case selling for cash was impractical, was an alternative tenant purchase system. This system would allow residents to buy the houses through a payment plan extending over a period, with the rent set at 10s per week (exclusive of rates). Ground rents would be perpetual, and while the Ministry was prepared to approve the tenant purchase system, they emphasised that cash sales would be the preferred approach.

The letter also provided detailed financial breakdowns of sale prices and payment plans for various types of houses in the Wycherley Housing Scheme, including one-room and four-room houses, as well as properties at the Cattle Market and Fairy's Well. For example, the minimum sale price for a one-room house at Wycherley was £130 10s, with a cash deposit of £60 10s and the balance paid via annuity over 31 years at 5% interest. The total annual payment would be £20, or 10s per week. Similarly, four-room houses at Wycherley had a minimum sale price of £404 5s, with a £54 5s cash deposit, and the balance paid over 27 years at 5% interest, with an annual payment of £26, or 10s per week. The houses at Cattle Market and Fairy's Well had a minimum sale price of £357, with a cash deposit of £32 and a balance to be paid via annuity over 23 years at 5% interest. The annual payment in this case would also be £26, or 10s per week.

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The Ministry also provided an alternative payment plan for those unable to make a large cash deposit. The lower deposits would result in longer payment periods, with total annual payments remaining at £26, or 10s per week. The members of the Corporation discussed the report, with some acknowledging the Ministry's preference for cash sales while recognising the challenges this could present. The required cash deposits might be too high for many potential tenants, and some members noted that the tenant purchase system might be more feasible. After the discussion, a motion was put forward by Mr. Horgan, seconded by Mr. Mulligan, to defer further consideration of the matter. This specific motion was approved, with the understanding that the Town Clerk, Acting City Solicitor, and City Treasurer would provide a further report on the issue before any final decisions were made. This would allow the Corporation to assess the feasibility and implications of both proposals more thoroughly before taking any action.¹⁰

It was asserted that the Cork City Corporation was facing difficulties with its housing schemes. With the aid of a government grant, a number of working-class houses have been built at an average cost of £800 each. However, if the houses were let in the ordinary way to tenants, the city Corporation would either face a significant loss on the scheme or be forced to charge rents that the workers would find prohibitive. One proposal suggested selling the houses for just over half their cost, allowing the Corporation to cut its losses and have some funds available to build more houses now that prices are falling. However, this proposal was met

¹⁰ *Cork Examiner* 24/8/1923

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with objections, as it was argued that no working man would be able to afford a £100 deposit, and the houses might be bought by individuals other than those for whom they were intended.

An alternative idea, deemed to be a more satisfactory proposal, was put forward. Under this new scheme, if a worker paid between £20 and £60 as a deposit, with an annuity of about £26 for 27 years, they would then, later, become the owner of the house. Under this particular arrangement, the tenant-purchaser would be responsible for paying the rates and maintaining the house, thus saving considerable expense for the Cork Corporation. Some time previously, the Dublin Corporation had attempted a similar scheme, but there were complaints that the houses were sold at a fraction of their cost, and in some cases, they were not given to those with the greatest need.¹¹

Also in 1923, tenders were invited from contractors for the construction of 20 houses on the Fahy's Well site in Cork, in accordance with the plans and specifications approved by the Housing Department of the Ministry for Local Government. These documents could be inspected at the offices of Messrs. B. O'Flynn and D. M. O'Connor, Architects, Trinity Chambers, 60 South Mall, Cork city. Tenders, submitted on the prescribed form and endorsed "Tender for Fahy's Well Housing Scheme," were to be addressed to the Presiding Chairman of Cork Corporation and deposited in the Tender Box.¹²

¹¹ *Irish Independent* 5/9/1923

¹² *Cork Examiner* 1/12/1923

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In December 1923, a meeting of the full Council of the Cork Corporation was held for the purpose of considering the allocation and fixing of rents for the houses on the Wycherley site. Councillor D. Horgan presided. The Chairman stated that the first item of business would be to consider the printed returns—one from the City Treasurer and the other from Councillor Kelleher—concerning the rents to be charged for the houses. In the City Treasurer's estimate, the rent for the larger houses was set at 8s. 2d. per week, and for the smaller houses, 5s. 3d. per week. Councillor Kelleher's estimate placed the rent for the large houses at 10s. 6d. per week, and for the smaller houses at 6s. 6d. per week. Some discussion followed regarding these figures, after which the question of disposing of the houses to suitable tenants under the Hire Purchase System was raised, according to terms already published. The Chairman remarked that the purchase system was a matter that required serious consideration, and he believed applications should be invited from working people who could afford to purchase the houses under the terms offered. Councillor Kelleher, senior, argued that very few working people, if any, could meet the conditions. A deposit of £19 10s. would be required, followed by a substantial rent to be paid for thirty or forty years. Under his proposed scheme, the houses could be let at a reasonable rent, securing genuine working people as tenants.

Councillor B. Egan stated that the purchase system would not only encourage thrift among the people but would also release funds that could be used for future schemes. It would also allow people to make their homes what they ought to be. Councillor Allen suggested that the Government should offer some

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concessions, as the British Government had in the past, so that houses could be rented for six or seven shillings per week. Sir J. Scott emphasised that the aim should be to house poor people, not very well-dressed individuals. Councillor Good argued that no restrictions should be placed on applicants. Applications for the houses should be reviewed and awarded to those who were entitled to them. If any tenants later wished to purchase their homes, they should be given every facility to do so. Councillor Kelleher, senior, proposed that if the houses were subsidised by the city Corporation for a period of fifteen years, a greater number of people would benefit, and the rents would be reduced to 10s. and 6s. 2d. per week. Councillor Mulligan moved, and Councillor B. M. Kegan seconded, that the Hire Purchase System be adopted for letting the houses.¹³

The Corporation received a note from the Minister for Local Government which stated that payment orders for the amounts of £3,352, £352, and £1,795 had been sent to Mr. Ireton, the Treasurer of Cork Corporation, as additional instalments of the grant allocated to the Corporation for the approved housing schemes being carried out at the Cattle Market, Rally's Well, and Wycherley project sites, in accordance with the Minister's previous circular letter dated 16th March 1922.¹⁴

In February 1924, a letter was read from the Minister of the Local Government Board, requesting an explanation as to how the rents for the houses on the Wycherley social housing site had been determined.

¹³ *Cork Examiner* 7/12/1923

¹⁴ *Cork Examiner* 19/12/1923

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The Secretary was instructed to provide a response. Sanctioning orders for the sums of £1,277 and £456 were received as further instalments of the Government grant in respect of the housing schemes at the Cattle Market and Fahy's Well sites, respectively.¹⁵

The correspondence addressed at a meeting of Cork Corporation included a fresh letter from the Ministry for Local Government, outlining concerns regarding the financial viability of the housing scheme on the Wycherley site. The Ministry pointed out that the estimated cost of providing the first 68 houses on the Wycherley site, including fencing and gas fittings, amounted to £65,746 12s. 3d. Of this total, £4,230 had been raised from local rates, and £54,000 was available from the Government grant, leaving a shortfall of £7,516 12s. 5d. to be financed by loan.

The Ministry further noted that the annual outgoings related to this loan would total £2,096 6s. 7d., or approximately £1,011 8s. 9d. for the 34 larger houses and £1,084 17s. 10d. for the 34 smaller houses. To meet these costs, the minimum weekly rents required would be 11s. 10d. and 11s. 4d. respectively.

However, the proposed rents—10s. 6d. and 9s. 6d. per week (inclusive of rates)—were effectively equivalent to actual rents of 7s. 3d. and 6s. 10d. for the five-roomed and four-roomed houses, respectively. Based on these rates, the gross receipts would amount to £1,321 10s. 4d., resulting in a projected annual deficit of nearly £700, which would have to be covered by the ratepayers. The Ministry emphasised that, in addition

¹⁵ *Cork Examiner* 9/2/1924

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to the State already contributing £300 per house toward the scheme, the ratepayers had made a significant financial contribution. The Minister stated that he could not entertain the imposition of any further burden on them. It was also noted that higher rents had been secured in other urban districts with less favourable circumstances. In light of this, the Ministry requested that the matter be reconsidered with a view to ensuring that the houses be let at rents sufficient to protect ratepayers from incurring any additional losses related to the scheme's maintenance.¹⁶

In April 1924, at a meeting of the Cork Corporation, with the Lord Mayor presiding, it was announced that payment orders for £1,825, £2,225, and £400 had been received as further instalments of the Government Grant for housing schemes. The Town Clerk also read a summary of letters from owners of destroyed property in the city, in response to a letter urging that, given the prevailing unemployment, there should be no further delays in starting the rebuilding efforts.¹⁷

In October 1924, the question of implementing a scheme for the improved cleansing of the city was referred to the Public Works and Public Health Committees for joint consideration. On the motion of Mr. J. Kelleher, it was decided to apply to the Ministry for Local Government and Public Health for a grant of £6,000 to support further housing schemes in Cork City.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Cork Examiner* 20/2/1924

¹⁷ *Cork Examiner* 12/4/1924

¹⁸ *Cork Examiner* 11/10/1924

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In November 1924, at a special meeting of the members of Cork Corporation, held in the City Courthouse with the Lord Mayor presiding, the members of that body reacted extremely negatively to the national government's decision to make the previously unimaginable decision of dissolving the city council. The Lord Mayor and members of Cork Corporation wished to record their strong public protest against the recent order of the Local Government Board dissolving the Borough Council of Cork. They viewed the order as entirely undeserved, uncalled for, and as an insult and indignity to an ancient Municipality. It was noted that, during the recent inquiry, it became clear that the financial difficulties faced by the Corporation had arisen primarily due to the extraordinary conditions prevailing in the country over the preceding six years. These challenging circumstances had significantly impacted the Corporation's financial position. The added operational costs across all departments, combined with the need to borrow on very short terms for urgent schemes such as housing and drainage, had led to a bank statement that had been showing a debit balance and significantly higher annual repayments than had been typical across previous decades. By way of comparison, it was pointed out that forty years earlier, Madden's Buildings had been constructed with a British Government loan repayable over forty years at a very moderate rate of interest. Those buildings were now fully paid for and the undisputed property of the Corporation. The members further noted the following points in their defence:

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1. No case of corruption was either preferred or proven.
2. No case of extravagant expenditure was proven.
3. No case of wilful neglect of public business was proven.
4. No charge was made of neglect or refusal to comply with official suggestions or orders. In fact, no suggestion or order from the Local Government Board had ever been disregarded or disobeyed.
5. The members of the Corporation had continued to conduct public business and to provide essential civic services efficiently and regularly, even during times of great difficulty and danger.

In light of the above, they strongly protested and deeply resented what they regarded as an entirely unjust and unfair decision by the Local Government Board to dissolve the Corporation.¹⁹

In January 1925, at a meeting of the Council of the Cork Chamber of Commerce, on the proposition of Mr. Foley, seconded by Mr. B. M. Egan, the following resolution was unanimously adopted at the meeting:

"That the Council of the Cork Chamber of Commerce unanimously endorses the action of the Commissioner for Cork Corporation in deciding to divert the award granted for the reconstruction of the City Hall and instead utilise it for the construction of houses for the working classes. That a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Local Government."

¹⁹ Cork Examiner 10/11/1924

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During the discussion that followed the adoption of the resolution, Mr. J. Lehane expressed the view that the Courthouse on Washington Street—being centrally located and architecturally imposing—should be converted into the new City Hall. He further suggested that the old barracks at Union Quay, currently under reconstruction, should be repurposed for use as Courts of Justice, and that the Bridewell property should be converted into headquarters for the Civic Guard. Mr. Foley concurred with Mr. Lehane's proposals, and the meeting agreed to submit a recommendation on the matter to the City Commissioner.²⁰

Later that month, the Commissioner for the County Borough (Cork City) invited proposals from residents of the city for the purchase of the twenty houses recently completed on the above-mentioned site, under the following terms:

- (a) Each house was offered for purchase at a price of £380, subject to the provisions of the Housing of the Working Classes (Ireland) Acts.
- (b) A deposit of £10 per house was required, followed by an annual payment of £26 (equivalent to 10 shillings per week) over a period of 31 years, exclusive of rates and maintenance charges. Full terms and conditions were to be made available to contractors upon application.²¹

At a meeting of the Co. Cork Board of Health in January 1926, Mr. Bradley moved that the Committee consider the advisability of taking over the barrack

²⁰ *Cork Examiner* 27/1/1925

²¹ *Cork Examiner* 29/1/1925

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buildings at Ballincollig with the aim of converting them into suitable housing for labourers. He explained that there were fifty such buildings, which had previously been used as married quarters by soldiers. An expenditure of approximately £80 per building would be sufficient to bring them into good condition, requiring only internal fittings. A proper sewerage system was available nearby. He argued that if the Government adhered to its previous statements, there should be no objection to using the buildings for this purpose. He also noted that another set of houses in the area, which could serve a similar function, were still being used as kennels for dogs, while labourers and their families were forced to live in makeshift tents along the road. This, he said, was a scandalous situation. He urged the County Council to take action and press the Government to address the housing crisis. Mr. O'Sullivan asked whether there had been any offer from a firm to take over the military barracks at Ballincollig for industrial use. Mr. Bradley responded that while a firm had shown interest in purchasing the buildings, nothing had come of it. He stressed that speculators should not be allowed to profit from the site while local workers were suffering from the lack of housing.

The Chairman also clarified that Mr. Bradley had previously raised the issue with Cork County Council, and on that occasion, a letter from the Ministry had been read, stating that the site was to be used for national purposes. Since then, no further developments had occurred. A deputation of local residents appeared before the meeting to support Mr. Bradley's motion. They pointed out that the walls of the dwellings were intact and that all that was needed was to roof them

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and add internal fittings. They emphasised that Ballincollig, as a district, was in a poor state, and the people there deserved help to improve their living conditions. Mr. O'Sullivan suggested that using the buildings for an industrial purpose would benefit the district more.

The Chairman agreed but noted that, unfortunately, such a project did not seem likely to materialise at present. Mr. Bradley responded that there were plenty of other properties in the area that could be used for industrial or other purposes, but the former married quarters should be prioritised for housing. Mr. Aherne suggested that the matter be referred to Mr. O'Flynn, the engineer, for a report on the condition of the buildings and the cost of making them suitable for housing. This suggestion was agreed upon.²²

At a meeting of the Cork Workers' Council (Cork Trades Union Council) in January 1926, Mr. J. Barry, H.C., raised concerns about the delay in progressing the Capwell Housing Scheme and suggested that the Secretary write to the City Commissioner to address the issue. He emphasised that the housing situation in the city was becoming increasingly critical. Some residents living in slum conditions, he noted, were in danger of losing their lives due to the appalling state of their dwellings, and, as there was, at that time, no alternative accommodation available, they could not be evicted.

Since 1916, only 146 houses had been constructed in Cork city, despite the fact that 2,300 were still needed.

²² *Cork Examiner* 14/1/1926

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Mr. Barry highlighted the plight of those living in lodgings, many of whom were being charged exorbitant rents, with some paying as much as fifteen to seventeen shillings per week for a single room. Alarmingly, he noted that it was often other workers who were demanding such rents, and many of these landlords were themselves living rent-free. He called for urgent action to address the worsening housing crisis and suggested that the Society of St. Vincent de Paul be asked to take a leading role in establishing a housing initiative. In conclusion, Mr. Barry criticised the delay on the Capwell site, stating that it was unjustifiable, especially given that £73,000 had already been allocated for the project.²³

At a luncheon hosted by the Cork Rotary Club, Mr. Philip Monahan, Borough Commissioner for Cork, announced his intention to raise a loan of £100,000 in Corporation Stock upon completion of an ongoing housing scheme. The funds would be used to finance a new project aimed at constructing 200 additional houses in the city. During his address, Mr. Monahan criticised the stance taken by both organised labour and the combined interests of employers, stating that the only viable solution to the housing crisis was to reduce construction costs. This, he argued, could be achieved either by lowering labour costs or by reducing the cost of materials—potentially through the use of alternative building materials. Mr. John Horgan, solicitor, who presided over the event, also spoke on municipal matters. He suggested that the headquarters of civic administration should be situated on the Grand Parade, proposing it as the location for the new City Hall. Mr.

²³ *Evening Echo* 22/1/1926

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Monahan expressed agreement, describing the site as an ideal location and noting that he had reason to believe there would be no difficulty in acquiring the necessary property for the development.²⁴

At a November 1926 meeting of the Co. Cork Board of Health, in connection with a proposed housing scheme and the division of lands in Ballincollig, the Secretary stated, in response to a query from Mr. Bradley, that he had contacted the Secretary of Cork County Council requesting that detailed information be provided.²⁵

At a 1927 meeting of the Southern Committee of the Co. Cork Board of Health, the Engineer, Mr. B. O'Flynn, reported on his inspection of the houses in the military barracks at Ballincollig, which were being considered for conversion into dwellings. He noted that there were 25 houses in three blocks. Each house contained a living room and a small pantry on the ground floor, with two bedrooms on the upper floor. However, the size of the houses was too small to accommodate a family as they were. Mr. O'Flynn suggested that three of the houses could be combined into two larger units by adding two rooms from the adjacent house on the ground floor and allocating the two upper rooms to the new house. This would result in two blocks of five houses (one larger than the other) and one block of six houses (all the same size). The cost of alterations and renovations would be approximately £295 per house for the 16 houses. Additionally, there was a block of twelve two-storey houses, each with separate upper and lower floors accessed via an iron

²⁴ *Evening Echo* 28/9/1926

²⁵ *Evening Echo* 19/11/1926

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balcony. These could be renovated to create eight two-storey houses with four bedrooms each, at a cost of about £280 per house. Mr. O'Flynn also pointed out that it might not be economically feasible to charge a reasonable rent unless the houses were associated with a sufficient amount of land (10 to 15 acres per house). While ground was available, the terms on which the houses and land could be acquired were unclear.

Mr. Bradley then spoke about the situation, noting that during the last election, statements were made blaming the County Council and its committees for not having a housing scheme in place. However, the issue was compounded by the lack of a clear statement from the Government regarding the rent that would be charged for the houses and land. He argued that without this information, the scheme could not progress further. Mr. Bradley moved that the Secretary be instructed to write to the relevant authorities to request definite figures on the rent for the buildings and land. He endorsed the scheme proposed by the Engineer, stating that it was an excellent plan with no objections. The meeting agreed that the Secretary should inquire about the rent that would be accepted for the buildings and land.²⁶

In November 1927, a reply to Richard Anthony TD of the Cork Workers' Council was published in the '*Cork Examiner*.' The letter, written by Mr. Monahan, was a response to a proposal regarding the Plumbers' Society and the Capwell Housing Scheme. Mr. Monahan expressed appreciation for the letter received on the subject, but regretted that he could not agree to the suggestion of discussing the matter with representatives

²⁶ *Cork Examiner* 1/9/1927

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of the Plumbers' Society. Based on previous meetings with the individual, Mr. Monahan knew the persuasive abilities of the Plumbers' Society, and feared that such an intervention would lead to a compromise on a critical issue, one that he viewed as a betrayal of the community's interests, to whom he was responsible.

Mr. Monahan stressed that any discussion on the matter could not be done without considering the broader implications. He highlighted the potential for similar claims from other craft unions in the building industry, which could escalate the issue. If the Plumbers' Society had been allowed to prevent even a minimal saving in construction costs, similar privileges would have had to be granted to other unions like the Masons' or the Carpenters. He also mentioned the possibility of allowing master plumbers to alter their contracts for increased profits, which he could not justify either. Mr. Monahan also pointed out the urgent need for affordable housing in the city, given the seemingly high construction costs, and consequently high rents. He further stressed that if every party in the building industry insisted on obstructing changes that could reduce their profits or labour costs, there was little hope for improvement in the housing conditions for the people. Mr. Monahan explained that his stance on this issue was driven by the belief that the need for cheaper housing far outweighed the need for maintaining employment for plumbers, and this was why he could not entertain any thoughts of compromise.

Mr. Monahan referenced a letter from the Plumbers' Society published in the '*Cork Examiner*,' which objected to the use of telescopic flush pipes. The only argument they had presented was that they had objected to these

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pipes years ago, and since then, they had imposed considerable levies on every building contract in the city. Mr. X questioned whether this was the way to encourage building or to reduce unemployment. While acknowledging that master builders had reluctantly accepted this alleged "blackmailing" of the people, he highlighted that employers had yielded to organised labour more than the industry could afford. This had led to a cycle of high wages, high costs, low output, and unemployment. Mr. Monahan clarified that he was not antagonistic to organised labour but believed much of the current distress was caused by the efforts of some craft unions to protect their members' rights at the expense of the broader industry and the general public. He concluded by mentioning that he hoped the recipient of the letter would not mind its publication in the press, as the matter was of vital concern to the city. Mr. Monahan apologised for refusing the offer of assistance, but appreciated the spirit in which it had been made. He hoped the recipient would understand his reasoning and the urgency of the issue.²⁷

While seated at Fitzgerald Park, Cork city, in April 1928, Mr. D. J. Hickie, Local Government Inspector, conducted a formal inquiry—under oath—into an application submitted by Commissioner Monahan on behalf of Cork Borough Council. The application sought a provisional order under the Public Health and Housing Acts to empower the Commissioner to compulsorily purchase certain lands at Evergreen, Cork City, for the development of a housing scheme. Mr. B. St. J. Galvin, the City Solicitor, appeared in support of the application. Representing the interests of the

²⁷ *Cork Examiner* 29/11/1927

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landlords, Messrs. Beamish and Crawford, was solicitor Mr. Cecil Exham. Mr. Farrington, the City Engineer, provided evidence explaining the approved plan drawn up by Mr. Levie for the proposed housing development at Evergreen. According to Mr. Farrington, the specific plot of land proposed for compulsory acquisition was essential to the overall site and scheme. All other land required for the development had already been acquired through agreement. He noted that a sewer needed to be laid through the plot in question in order to make the necessary connection to Evergreen Road. Mr. Exham stated that his clients, the landlords, did not oppose the housing scheme or the application itself. However, he also emphasised that the matter of compensation remained outstanding. Inspector Hickie clarified that compensation would not fall under his remit. Mr. Farrington added that the Council was seeking to acquire only the absolute minimum amount of land necessary for the scheme. The current occupier of the land did not object to the acquisition.

Mr. Galvin commented that the occupier was agreeable, provided appropriate compensation was granted—an issue that would be addressed through proper channels. Inspector Hickie acknowledged the urgent need for housing in Cork, a sentiment with which Mr. Farrington fully agreed. When asked whether it was difficult to obtain suitable land within the city for building purposes, Mr. Farrington confirmed that it was. He further explained that the current scheme was central to a larger development plan encompassing approximately 80 acres in the direction of Friar's Walk. The sewer infrastructure proposed in the current plan would facilitate future expansion and unlock development potential across the

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valley. Additional evidence was presented by Jeremiah Ahern regarding the proper service of all necessary notices connected to the application. Following this, the inquiry was formally closed. The Minister's decision on the matter would be announced in due course.²⁸

In late May 1928, Commissioner Monahan convened at the Corporation Offices in Fitzgerald's Park, Cork city, to consider tenders for the construction of 152 houses on the site at Turner's Cross. A total of seven tenders were received. The submissions were as follows:

- W. L. Kelleher & Co., Drinan Street, Cork – £107,095
- J. Buckley, 18 Grattan Street, Cork – £96,964
- John Delaney & Co., Henry Street, Cork – £85,951
- Murphy Bros., North Abbey Street, Cork – £76,122
- Meagher & Hayes, Drinan Street, Cork – £74,400
- Wheneley & Bradshaw, Newcastle-on-Tyne – £74,000
- The Housing Corporation of Great Britain, London – £63,411 4s. 3d

According to Mr. Levie, the main tender was for solid wall concrete block houses, with nine-inch thick walls. A clause in the specifications required that local wage rates be honoured and that employment be given to local tradespeople. At the Commissioner's request, the clause was read aloud: "Recognised Trades Union rates of wages to be paid, and local tradesmen to be given preference for employment."

²⁸ *Cork Examiner* 26/4/1928

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Mr. Coveney commented that the lowest tender had represented an exceptionally low figure. In response, the Commissioner asked for a comparison with the costs of the previous housing scheme. The Town Clerk produced the records, and Mr. Lane noted that the comparison was difficult, as the houses were of a different type. For the earlier scheme, the intermediate house type had cost £316, end-of-terrace houses were priced at £339, and parlour-type houses at £427. These were comparable to the five-roomed houses in the current scheme, which had been priced at £601 in the former contract. The new contract allowed for an eighteen-month construction period. Commissioner Monahan noted the significant reduction in cost and decided to accept the lowest tender—submitted by the Housing Corporation of Great Britain—for the amount of £63,411 4s. 3d. This acceptance was made subject to ministerial sanction and the provision of approved sureties.

The Corporation also received a communication from the Irish Sailors and Soldiers' Land Trust in Dublin regarding the naming of twenty-four recently constructed houses under their housing scheme. It was announced that the four houses located on the Ballinlough Road would be named "Douglas Terrace," while the remaining twenty houses, which front onto Boreenmanna Road, would be known as "Haig Gardens."²⁹

In July 1928, the City Engineer submitted a report on the Coppinger Acre housing scheme. In relation to the application made by the Sailors' and Soldiers' Land

²⁹ *Cork Examiner* 26/5/1928

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Trust for the public takeover of the road at Fair Hill for ongoing maintenance, he confirmed that the road was in satisfactory condition when the final statement of accounts had been issued. On this basis, it was decided that the road would be formally taken over by the local authority. Additionally, the City Engineer presented a report concerning a proposal from the Irish Omnibus Company Ltd. regarding the installation of petrol facilities. A similar report was also submitted in relation to a proposal from Messrs. O'Connor Bros. of Blarney Street. However, consideration of both proposals was deferred pending the submission of detailed plans and specifications for the works, as requested by the Engineer.³⁰

At a meeting held in December 1928, it was confirmed that work on the city Corporation housing site at Turner's Cross was progressing satisfactorily. Of the 152 houses planned for construction, 100 were already underway, with 25 of those having reached the roofing stage. On average, approximately 150 men were employed by the contractors, representing all the building trades as well as general labourers.³¹

In 1929, Cork Corporation became the first local authority in Ireland to adopt a more modern council management system, with Mr. Philip Monahan's title being changed to that of 'City Manager' to reflect this change. This also restored the elected council, while

³⁰ *Cork Examiner* 15/6/1928

³¹ *Cork Examiner* 6/12/1928

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limiting it to 21 members, and a veto over by-laws and the annual rate.³²

During a March 1929 parliamentary debate on the Housing Bill, Mr. Edmond Carey of Cork East expressed cautious support for the proposed housing bill, noting that while it was a welcome measure in principle, it offered limited benefit to urban districts due to the insufficient powers and financial support provided to local authorities. He argued that many councils were ready to take on the responsibility of house building if they were granted access to long-term loans at low interest rates. This, he said, was the only viable way to give local authorities a fair chance to carry out housing schemes and to complete those that remained unfinished.

Mr. Carey emphasised that the high rates of interest being charged under current arrangements resulted in rents of up to 10 shillings per week—an amount unaffordable for most labourers in both urban and rural areas. He pointed out that rural districts were just as lacking in habitable housing as the cities and appealed to the Minister to support these communities by offering them the financing they needed. If provided with fair loan terms, he argued, local authorities would not need grants, as they were fully prepared to shoulder the burden of construction. Houses for the working classes, he noted, were never intended to turn a profit, although they eventually became valuable community assets. He also urged the Minister to re-enact the provisions of the Labourers Acts of 1906 and 1909 to ensure that rural workers received equal consideration.

³² 'Philip Monahan' - *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (2009)

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Mr. Thomas Mullins of Cork also criticised the bill for failing to address the housing crisis in rural areas, describing it as a superficial measure that merely tinkered with the broader problem. He stated that the idea of establishing a National Housing Board had been dismissed, but in his view, it was the only effective way to approach the issue on a national scale. He accused the Government of lacking the courage and capability to confront the housing crisis properly and expressed disappointment that the bill contained no proposals to deal with congestion in the Gaeltacht regions. Mr. John Daly, also from Cork, called on the Minister to reinstate the reconstruction provisions, arguing that they were vital for the welfare of small farmers, whose needs had consistently been overlooked. He suggested that restoring the powers granted under the Labourers Acts to Boards of Health and Rural District Councils would go a long way in alleviating the severe housing deficiencies still present in many communities. The debate was continued by other members, including Messrs. O'Connor, Coburn, and McEntee.

In response, General R. Mulcahy, Minister for Local Government, acknowledged that housing was indeed a national issue. However, he criticised many of those raising the issue for focusing only on localised aspects rather than taking a comprehensive, national perspective. He noted that, to his recollection, the Government had never sought assistance from other parties in the House to help resolve the housing crisis. While some argued for borrowing substantial sums of money to address the problem, he pointed out that any such move required careful consideration of where that

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money would come from. General Mulcahy outlined the Government's housing record since 1922, reporting that 21,600 houses had been built at a total cost to the taxpayer of £2,050,000. Looking to the future, he stated that the Government's goal was to provide a further 40,000 houses at a lower cost to both taxpayers and builders. This would be achieved, he said, not through external pressure but by implementing a policy aimed at reducing the cost of construction itself.³³

In June 1929, The City Manager announced that applications were being accepted from prospective occupants for the new houses at Turner's Cross. The houses were available for purchase at prices of £500, £400, and £375, depending on the class of dwelling. Alternatively, applicants could opt to make an initial deposit—accepted in multiples of £5—towards the purchase price, with the remaining balance to be paid through weekly instalments of 13 shillings, 10 shillings and 6 pence, or 10 shillings, corresponding to the value of the house. Preference would be given to applicants offering the highest initial deposits.³⁴

Housing in the city was mentioned at the July 1929 monthly executive meeting of the Cork Child Welfare League, with Mr. J. Hurley, N.T., presiding. Those in attendance included Mrs. M. Lynch, Mrs. P. Daly, Mr. Buckley, Mrs. M. Murphy, Mrs. J. Dwyer, and Mr. P. Murphy. In her report, the Secretary, Miss V. O'Brien, noted that a number of children had recently received the new immunisation treatment against diphtheria. This led Mr. Murphy to speak about the alarming levels

³³ *Cork Examiner* 22/3/1929

³⁴ *Cork Examiner* 8/6/1929

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of overcrowding he had observed during his visits to the north side of the city. In one case, he found ten individuals living in a single room; in another, three separate families were occupying just one room.

The Chairman responded by stating that urgent action was required by the relevant authorities to address the harmful effects of such overcrowding. He emphasised that the only real solution was the provision of adequate housing, and that any new housing schemes under consideration should specifically aim to relieve congestion in the areas Mr. Murphy described. He pointed out that previous housing schemes had done little to alleviate overcrowding, which continued to undermine the work of the League and other similar organisations. He praised the resilience of those living under such degrading conditions, remarking that it was remarkable how moral and decent people remained despite the circumstances in which they were forced to live.

Mrs. Lynch added that while the public health work being carried out across the city under the leadership of the Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Saunders, was commendable, it would ultimately be ineffective if not paired with improvements in housing. She stressed that the health of the community depended just as much on proper housing as it did on medical intervention. She urged immediate action to help eliminate the spread of infectious diseases, which, as Dr. Saunders had noted in his most recent report, remained prevalent in the city. Mr. Murphy then proposed, and Mrs. Dwyer seconded, a motion which was unanimously adopted:

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*“That the Child Welfare League request the public authorities to take immediate steps to address the problem of overcrowding in local tenement housing. We firmly believe this to be the primary cause of tuberculosis, diphtheria, and other infectious diseases.”*³⁵

A feature editorial in the ‘Cork Examiner’ from February 1930 discussed the allocation of funding to housing projects, and the opportunity cost of rebuilding the City Hall. This editorial offered a critical opinion on the housing situation in Cork, highlighting both the progress made and the challenges the city faced due to its rapid industrial expansion. The writer acknowledged that housing conditions had improved over the past decade but argued that these improvements were insufficient, particularly in light of the unprecedented growth spurred by Henry Ford's motor factory. The editorial emphasised that the city's population had been dramatically affected by workers migrating to Cork and locals seeking better living conditions, creating a severe housing shortage. The writer critiqued the slow response to this crisis, noting that no significant measures had been taken to address it. The editorial cited a recent resolution passed by the Cork Incorporated Chamber of Commerce and Shipping, which had called for postponing the construction of the new City Hall in favor of focusing resources on a housing scheme. The writer suggested that this proposal deserved serious consideration, questioning whether a new City Hall should have taken precedence over providing suitable housing for the growing number of workers in Cork city. The editorial argued that building housing for workers would have been a financially

³⁵ Cork Examiner 2/7/1929

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sound investment for the city, with the potential to nearly double the money invested within a few years. By framing the City Hall project as less urgent than addressing the housing crisis, the writer advocated for prioritising the welfare of workers over architectural aspirations. This opinion piece clearly underscored the writer's belief that the immediate need for affordable housing far outweighed the construction of a new City Hall.³⁶

At the meeting of Cork Corporation in March 1930, the City Manager submitted the following report:

"In accordance with your instructions dated 27th August 1929, plans were prepared for the continuation of the Turner's Cross housing scheme. Development of the site had progressed satisfactorily since Christmas, and it should be possible to invite tenders for the construction of 155 houses by the end of March. It would, therefore, be necessary to authorise the borrowing of a sum not exceeding £100,000."

Mr. Monahan added that the proposed borrowing figure exceeded the immediate requirements, but should it prove feasible to secure the full amount, the surplus could be applied to future housing schemes. The current scheme would require approximately £50,000, but due to the high cost of floating stock, it was more economical to issue a larger amount. The expenses associated with issuing £50,000 would be nearly as high as for £100,000.

³⁶ Cork Examiner 24/2/1930

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Mr. Allen expressed dissatisfaction that the northern side of the city had been neglected in terms of housing development, stating that no houses had been built there in the past ten years. Mr. O'Leary questioned the City Manager about Insurance Societies linked to municipal insurance. The City Manager replied that he would need notice of such a question in order to investigate it properly. Mr. Liam de Róiste queried whether the Council was obligated to proceed with the Turner's Cross site. The City Manager confirmed that the Council had approved the site in August of the previous year.

In response to Mr. Barry's inquiry, the City Manager reported a balance of approximately £30,000 available at present. He proposed to use that sum in addition to £50,000 from the proposed borrowing. Mr. Barry asked whether this would include completion of the site layout. The City Manager confirmed that it would, for the 150 houses and also for developing adjacent land for potential private builders. Mr. O'Sullivan objected to confining efforts to southern sites, stressing that the city needed 1,000 houses, not 150. He strongly opposed neglecting the northern side and suggested that £50,000 be allocated for that district.

Mr. Desmond inquired whether the new houses would be cheaper and built to the same standard as previous developments. The City Manager confirmed they would be of similar type, and anticipated rents to remain at approximately 9s. 6d. per week—considered modest for a home. Mr. Horgan criticised the condition of several derelict sites across the city, particularly on the north side, where houses had been demolished and the areas left in poor condition. He urged the Council

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to act to improve their appearance. The City Manager responded that the Council currently lacked the authority to do so. On Mr. Horgan's proposal, it was decided that the City Solicitor would investigate the matter, and that if no legal powers existed, steps should be taken to acquire them. The Council then unanimously approved the necessary authorisation for the City Manager to borrow funds for the housing development.³⁷

In late March 1930, at a Special City Hall Committee meeting, the City Manager reported that the compensation decree for the City Hall totalled £68,000. This sum had been allocated to the Capwell housing scheme. It was estimated that the cost of constructing new municipal buildings would be £120,000. However, the City Manager expressed doubt that this amount could be raised in the immediate future, given the prevailing conditions in the money market. At that time, he was seeking to secure a housing loan of £100,000, with the Council's authority, and an additional £25,000 was already in hand. Meanwhile, transfers of net revenue generated from the Capwell housing units were being directed towards recouping the amount spent under the compensation decree.

The Committee was in agreement that the construction of new houses should remain the priority. It was therefore recommended that a deputation consisting of Alderman Daly, Councillors Sir J. J. Fitzgerald, J. C. Foley, LL.D., B. E. Sutton, and the City Manager be appointed to meet with the management of the Munster and Leinster Bank to explore potential

³⁷ *Cork Examiner* 12/3/1930

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solutions to the financial constraints. The Lord Mayor clarified that the Committee had not rejected the City Hall reconstruction project outright. However, they were firmly of the view that it should not interfere with or delay the housing programme. Should an opportunity arise to secure a separate loan for the City Hall, the project could then be reconsidered. At present, the Committee believed such borrowing was not feasible.

Councillor Barry remarked that housing would remain in demand for the next ten years. He argued that while it might take a decade to address the existing shortfall, they could not afford to delay the City Hall for the same duration. He acknowledged that housing was a more urgent concern than a municipal building, but emphasised that the Committee had not agreed to indefinitely postpone the City Hall project. The appointment of the deputation to the bank management was a pragmatic step. He noted that the banking interest rate was reportedly falling, which made it an opportune moment to pursue loans for both the City Hall and the housing scheme. Cork, unlike other cities in the British Isles, lacked a proper City Hall, and there was currently no facility to receive visiting dignitaries or tourists. In his view, every effort should be made to secure funding and proceed with construction. Councillor Allen also expressed agreement with Councillor Barry, despite recognising that housing was a greater priority. Councillor de Róiste also supported Councillor Barry's stance, stating that the present financial climate might be ideal for borrowing. He warned that if the City Hall project was postponed

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until all housing needs were met, Cork might be left without a City Hall for another ten years.³⁸

A special meeting of the Cork Corporation was convened in April 1930 to consider the proposed further housing scheme involving the construction of 150 additional houses at Turner's Cross. Mr. D. A. Levie, the architect for the project, was present and provided a detailed explanation of the scheme. Following his presentation, the plans were unanimously approved on the motion of Councillor Foley, seconded by Councillor O'Leary. Several members expressed the view that it would be highly desirable to include smaller-sized houses in the programme to better meet the needs of families on lower incomes. The City Manager responded that, of the £100,000 currently being borrowed, approximately £50,000—along with the £30,000 already in hand—would likely be sufficient to cover the present scheme. The remaining £50,000 could potentially be allocated to the construction of more modest dwellings, subject to the availability of suitable sites. It was agreed to recommend the formation of a sub-committee comprising Councillors D. Gamble, S. O'Leary, and J. Barry to accompany the City Manager on an inspection of potential sites, with a report to be presented to the Council in due course.

Councillor O'Sullivan raised concerns that the northern side of the city was being unfairly neglected in housing developments. He questioned how many houses had been built on the southern side and asserted that not a single house had been constructed in the north in recent years. He described the area as a large

³⁸ *Cork Examiner* 26/3/1930

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industrial district with overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions, calling the situation a scandal. He suggested that Fair Hill would be a suitable location for development and proposed that other northern sites be explored, even if access had to be created through existing laneways. The City Manager responded that over 500 houses had been built on the southern side in the past few years. The Lord Mayor then suggested that Councillor O'Sullivan join the sub-committee and assist in identifying suitable sites on the northern side. Councillor Allen supported the idea of building houses in all parts of the city, but emphasised that the rents must remain affordable—at five, six, or seven shillings per week—as many working-class families could not afford higher rates. Councillor Ellis warned against turning the discussion into a divisive issue between the north and south. He urged the Council to focus on providing the cheapest possible homes for the people, regardless of location, and noted that the committee had already met and presented its report, so further delays were unnecessary. The Lord Mayor agreed that any member could suggest alternative sites for consideration. Councillor de Róiste remarked that future town planning should aim to alleviate congestion in the north of the city, while Councillor Daly noted that the committee had taken a broader perspective on the housing issue, rather than simply its cost.³⁹

In August 1930, the City Manager had invited tenders for the construction of 155 houses—either as a single contract or in multiple lots—at the Turner's Cross Housing Site, Cork city. The works were to be carried out in accordance with the plans and specifications

³⁹ *Cork Examiner* 23/4/1930

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prepared by Messrs. Chillingworth and Levie, Architects, of 11 South Mall. The drawings and specifications were available for inspection at their office. Copies of the Bills of Quantities and official Tender Forms could be obtained from the Architects upon payment of £1, which was refundable upon submission of a bona fide tender. Tenders, submitted on the official forms and accompanied by the priced Bills of Quantities, were to be placed in a sealed envelope marked "Tender for Turner's Cross Housing Scheme" and delivered to the City Manager no later than 12 noon on Tuesday, 9th September 1930. It was stated that the lowest or any tender would not necessarily be accepted. The successful contractor would be required to enter into a satisfactory bond to ensure the proper fulfilment of the contract.⁴⁰

In early September 1930, at the meeting of Cork Corporation, a discussion arose following a formal proposal to issue £100,000 in stock to fund the construction of 150 houses in the Turner's Cross area. In response to a query from Alderman Daly, the City Manager explained that the stock would be issued in multiples of £10 and would carry a five per cent dividend, payable semi-annually. Mr. Horgan raised concerns regarding access to housing, noting that several respectable tenants—currently living in substandard conditions—had been unable to secure homes under the previous scheme due to the upfront payment requirements of £50 or £60. He requested clarification on how the new houses would be allocated, stating that if the same conditions applied as before, he could not support the proposal to raise the necessary

⁴⁰ *Cork Examiner* 13/8/1930

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funds. The City Manager responded that he was more than willing to follow any direction set by the Council regarding the allocation process for the new houses. He acknowledged, however, that no matter what rules were implemented, many deserving individuals would still be left without accommodation. Mr. Good expressed agreement with Mr. Horgan's sentiments. The Lord Mayor then sought confirmation from the members on whether they supported Mr. Monahan's position, to which they unanimously agreed. Alderman French added that the City Manager had previously given a similar assurance regarding housing allocations.⁴¹

At another September 1930 meeting of the Cork Corporation, Councillor O'Leary, in accordance with prior notice, proposed that, given the Council's approval of building sites at Mayfield and the recent formation of a Utility Society in the district with the specific aim of constructing housing there, the City Manager should be authorised to commence negotiations for the acquisition of a site. Upon the successful completion of these negotiations, the City Manager would then proceed with the site's development, with the expectation that at least the number of houses guaranteed by the Utility Society would be built. This motion was seconded by Councillor Horgan and subsequently agreed to by the Council. Alderman Allen proposed that the name of Rochford's Lane, located off the Grand Parade, be officially changed to Rochford's Avenue. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Sir John Fitzgerald and was approved. Alderman Allen further proposed that the name of Bailey's Lane be changed to Wolfe Tone

⁴¹ *Evening Echo* 3/9/1930

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Avenue, a motion that was seconded by Councillor O'Donovan.⁴²

An arbitration sitting was held in late September 1930 in the main Cork city Courthouse, Washington St., to determine the purchase money or compensation to be paid for lands acquired under the Cork County Borough Housing Order of 1929, made under the provisions of the Housing of the Working Classes (Ireland) Acts, 1890 to 1921. The arbitration was opened by Mr. George Hewson of Dublin, who had been appointed as arbitrator by the Land Values Reference Committee to make such determinations. The arbitration concerned land acquired by the Cork City Council in relation to the recently initiated housing scheme at the Capwell site. The cases considered were those in which agreement had not been reached between the City Council and the interested parties regarding the amount of compensation to be paid for the lands in question. A number of landowners and occupiers, holding rights or interests in the lands, hereditaments, or premises, attended the hearing and submitted their claims to the arbitrator.

Statements were taken from the claimants, maps of the lands were carefully examined, and Mr. Hewson recorded the supporting arguments and evidence for each case. The final awards for the various claims would be announced in due course. Mr. B. St. J. Galvin, City Solicitor, represented the City Council. Many of the landowners and occupiers were represented by barristers and solicitors, and were assisted by engineers in presenting and substantiating their claims to

⁴² *Cork Examiner* 25/9/1930

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compensation for the lands on which houses had been constructed. It was expected that Mr. Hewson's sitting would continue for several days.⁴³

In mid-October 1930, at the quarterly full meeting of Cork Corporation, the minutes of the Housing Sub-Committee meeting held on 9th October, which were duly adopted, included the following key points, among them being that the Sub-Committee had reviewed the proposed slum clearance and housing scheme in the north-west ward. It was agreed that the plan, as outlined in the reports submitted by the City Manager and the Architect, represented a reasonable approach to tackling this particularly challenging aspect of the city's housing crisis, and that it should be implemented. However, given the significant estimated cost of £240,000 and the importance of maintaining momentum on current housing schemes in other areas, the Committee requested a report from the City Manager outlining the most effective way to finance the entire housing programme over a projected five-year period. In the meantime, a final recommendation regarding the proposed scheme was deferred.⁴⁴

In November 1930, it was raised that the Department of Local Government and Public Health had previously communicated regarding Cork Corporation's proposal to implement an additional housing scheme under the Housing of the Working Classes Acts. The Minister indicated that he had no objection to the Corporation inviting tenders for the construction of 108 houses, in accordance with the modifications proposed by the

⁴³ *Evening Echo* 26/9/1930

⁴⁴ *Cork Examiner* 15/10/1930

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Corporation's architect in his report. It was advised that alternative quotations should be sought for:

- eight-inch mass concrete versus nine-inch concrete blocks;
- fibrous plaster ceilings.

Due to the associated installation costs, the inclusion of baths was to be omitted from the plans. Alderman Allen queried whether it was not the Corporation's intent to utilise concrete blocks, asserting that they should be trusted to manage their own affairs. The Lord Mayor clarified that the alternatives were included at the Department's request, and that no action could be taken until tenders were received. Mr. Horgan noted that the Corporation had little choice in the matter and had acted to the best of its ability. When asked whether there would be a re-advertisement, the Lord Mayor confirmed in the affirmative. The City Manager added that the Department maintained the view that if tenants wished to have baths, they should be willing to install them at their own expense. Including them in the build would, in the Department's view, raise the cost of the houses unnecessarily. Alderman Allen remarked that the homes should be constructed with a view to keeping rents as affordable as possible. It was then agreed to re-advertise for tenders.

The City Manager then presented a report which was referred to the Housing Committee:

"In accordance with your instruction dated the 28th ultimo, I met with the Minister for Local Government and Public Health on Friday, the 14th instant, to discuss:

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- *The level of financial support that local authorities could expect for housing over the next five years;*
- *The possibility of legislative changes that would enable the Council to acquire houses and land in insanitary areas on more favourable terms than the existing law permits;*
- *The availability of capital from the Local Loans Fund to support housing development in the County Borough over the next five years.”*

The Minister had reviewed Mr. Boyd Barrett's report on the proposed slum clearance scheme in the north-west, along with earlier reports outlining our anticipated capital needs. He expressed a strong appreciation for the Council's approach and was particularly encouraged by the submission of a concrete proposal to address the slum issue, which had been under active consideration by his Department for some time. The Minister authorised me to inform the Council that, following his Department's extensive review of the matter, plans were being developed that would shortly be translated into legislation. These plans would introduce far-reaching policy changes, including:

- A renewed emphasis on the rapid removal of overcrowded and insanitary dwellings;
- Expanded powers for local authorities to address derelict or dilapidated properties;
- Improved financial support;
- A focus on providing housing at rents more closely aligned with the earning capacity of workers.

These initiatives would be coupled with administrative safeguards to ensure that while the number of new dwellings would rise substantially, every effort would be

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made to reinforce the ongoing reduction in building costs. In conclusion, the Minister conveyed his regret at being unable to provide more detailed information at that time but assured the Council of his full support and commitment to offering further updates as soon as they became available.⁴⁵

At the January 1931 meeting of the General Purposes' Committee of Cork Corporation, presided over by the Lord Mayor, a report was read from the City Manager regarding the sale of houses at Turner's Cross. He reported that the total cost of the scheme, which consisted of 152 houses, had amounted to £76,716. The five-room parlour-bathroom houses cost £589 each, the four-room end-of-terrace houses amounted to £503, and the four-room intermediate houses cost £478. These homes were offered for sale at the prices of £500, £400, and £375 respectively. Weekly repayment amounts were set at 12 shillings 6 pence, 10 shillings and 6 pence, and 10 shillings, depending on the type of house. All successful applicants were verbally informed that they would also be required to pay local rates in addition to the weekly instalments. The Committee approved the report.

The City Manager also submitted another report relating to tenders received for a new housing development at Turner's Cross, comprising 168 houses. The tenders were as follows: Lee Brothers, Enfield, Middlesex – £67,200; Meagher & Hayes, Drinan Street, Cork – £69,726 10s 3d; Coughlan Bros., South Terrace, Cork – £69,704 14s 10d; Murphy Bros., North Abbey Street, Cork – £73,290; John Buckley, 18

⁴⁵ *Cork Examiner* 19/11/1930

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Grattan Street, Cork – £75,227; Housing Corporation of Great Britain Ltd., Cork – £77,954 3s 3d; Jones & Co., Bandon, Co. Cork – £79,987 13s 11d; and John Kenny & Sons, Harcourt Road, Dublin – £82,884 5s 10d.

Although Lee Brothers had submitted the lowest tender, it was noted that their bid was not accompanied by a priced bill of quantities. Therefore, it was proposed that the Corporation seek the sanction of the Minister for Local Government and Public Health to accept the tender of Meagher & Hayes. Their proposal reflected an average cost of £415 per house, compared to the £502 per house estimated in a recent tender previously rejected by the Minister. This report, too, was approved by the Committee.⁴⁶

A February 1931 meeting of Cork Corporation highlighted that, in connection with the aforementioned North-West Ward housing scheme, and at the request of Mr. O'Sullivan, the Town Clerk read the recommendation of the Housing Sub-Committee from 11th November 1930. The recommendation advised that steps be taken to secure land for housing development in the North-West Ward. Mr. O'Sullivan stated that, at the previous meeting, the City Manager had claimed that no direction had been given in this matter. However, the minutes just read clearly had allegedly demonstrated that such an instruction had indeed been issued, namely, to acquire Griffin's Fields, where it had been proposed to build 200 houses on virgin land. Mr. O'Sullivan said that the City Manager had, in practical effect, reversed course by denying any

⁴⁶ *Cork Examiner* 7/1/1931

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instruction was given. He emphasised that residents on the north side of the city were paying rent and rates like everyone else, and he now proposed that the Council take action to acquire Griffin's Fields, to prove to the people that they were not being misled.

He formally proposed that an instruction be issued to the Manager to proceed with the construction of 200 houses on Griffin's Fields. Alderman Allen seconded the motion and referred to the urgent housing needs in the North-West Ward. Mr. Horgan stated that no one opposed the immediate commencement of the North-West scheme. The City Manager responded by saying his interpretation of the Committee's wishes was to advance the North-West scheme as soon as possible. The only disagreement lay in defining what could be considered "the earliest possible moment" to begin. In presenting his report to the Council, the City Manager had pointed out that the housing plan represented a building programme projected over five years. He noted that the current legislation governing housing grants was due to expire shortly, and there was no clarity about what level of support, if any, would be forthcoming from the Government during that period.

It was therefore decided to contact the Ministry to clarify the Government's intentions regarding housing legislation. The Minister had indicated general approval of the Council's proposal and had expressed particular interest in the slum-clearance scheme put forward by the Corporation. He also stated that his Department had been drafting a Bill to provide the necessary funding to enable such schemes to proceed. However, that Bill had not yet been introduced. Given those circumstances, the City Manager warned it would

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be unwise for the Council to take the initial step of purchasing land without being certain they could follow through with the second step — actual construction. Acquiring Griffin's Fields was, in itself, a simple matter, but the land would likely remain unused until the legislation was in place to finance the building of the proposed 200 houses.

Dr. Foley asked if an option had been secured on the field. The Manager replied that no such option had been obtained. He further stated that the earliest safe date for committing to the first stage would be once the new housing legislation was formally introduced. The City Manager emphasised that the scheme would not be viable until substantial financial support from the Government was guaranteed. He added that the best way to accelerate the project would be to press the Minister to expedite the proposed legislation. The Lord Mayor concluded that the necessary preliminary steps should be taken to determine the cost of acquiring the land, and that a report should be submitted to the Council. His suggestion was agreed to, and it was decided to communicate with the Minister with a view to expediting the introduction of the new housing legislation.⁴⁷

This passage is a public presentation on housing developments and challenges in Cork city, given by officials and several stakeholders involved in city planning, construction, and its finances.

In a public presentation on the housing projects undertaken by Cork Corporation, held in August 1931,

⁴⁷ *Cork Examiner* 18/2/1931

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a primary scheme discussed was the Evergreen housing site No. 1, which comprised 152 houses. Adjacent to this was the Hawkers site, developed by the Sailors and Soldiers Trust, on which 29 houses were erected. Additionally, the Ashburton site was developed by the city Corporation in 1930, with 32 houses under construction, and twelve more under negotiation. This site had originally been suggested by an external body interested in building on it, and the foundations of the 32 houses were laid only a few days after the development began. The land was developed by the Corporation, with a portion leased to the building society. The presentation also asserted that closely connected to housing was the issue of slum clearance, which had become a focus for the local authority. In the north-east corner of the borough lay a tract of elevated land filled with mean, densely packed houses. Many of these were now in ruins or only partially habitable due to dilapidation and demolition, creating an unsanitary and blighted area. At the Corporation's initiative, Mr. Boyd Barrett, architect, prepared a scheme to clear the area in stages, in order to avoid displacing current residents en masse. The first stage proposed acquiring around ten acres of undeveloped land and constructing approximately 200 houses. Once this initial phase was completed, residents from part of the slum area would be relocated into the new homes, enabling the cleared portion to be redeveloped. This process would continue until the entire area was transformed.

The presentation also noted that, importantly, the transformation actually went beyond simply replacing dilapidated houses with better ones; it included infrastructure upgrades such as constructing a main road through the area. Concluding his address, Mr.

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Farrington, the City Engineer, stated that Cork's local authority had engaged in all aspects of housing development—direct construction, site preparation, leasing of fully developed plots, slum clearance, and even tentative rural sewerage planning to support future urban growth. Mr. Clarke, in proposing a vote of thanks to Mr. Farrington, remarked on the efficiency of site development compared to housing construction costs. This supported the modern trend toward reducing housing density. He praised the Corporation's courage in opening up new development sites for private enterprise and noted that builders generally hesitated to invest in new roads. The Corporation's proactive approach in laying down road infrastructure had paid off, as those sites were quickly taken up by builders. Mr. Farrington's adherence to town planning principles, such as constructing a central main road, was highlighted. Mr. Clarke, familiar with Mr. Farrington's previous work in Northern Ireland and Dublin, also commended his impressive engineering projects in Cork city, including concrete roads, bridges, and a water filtration plant. He reflected on visiting Cork city fifteen years earlier and being struck by its natural beauty, limestone buildings, and exceptional masonry.

Mr. Fogarty, in seconding, expressed concern that despite extensive discussions, real solutions to the housing problem remained elusive. He acknowledged the success of Cork city's model of providing developed sites for private builders, but noted it had not worked as well in smaller towns. In one case, a local authority even offered free sites with a nominal ground rent, but the uptake was disappointing. People now sought homes at the lowest possible rent. He questioned whether it was

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fair to include the cost of road construction in housing rent calculations, especially when concrete roads significantly increased expenses. While roads were vital for urban infrastructure, they shouldn't impose an undue financial burden on residents.

Mr. P. Monahan, the Cork City Manager, emphasised that while the prices of most goods had fallen, housing costs remained stubbornly high. He warned that improving living conditions at current costs was impossible. Cork had completed two excellent but economically unsustainable housing schemes, including the Capwell Scheme, which incurred a capital loss of £20,000 on 150 houses. Although replicating such schemes tenfold was desirable, it was financially unfeasible. He criticised the building industry as failing to deliver value for money and identified high construction costs as the central issue in the housing crisis. Monahan believed that if architects and engineers were left to handle the problem, solutions might emerge, and he hoped future decision-makers would focus on reducing costs.

Mr. D. J. Tierney, B.E., supported the vote of thanks and praised Mr. Farrington's contributions. He noted that Cork was the first Irish city to adopt a modern road system in 1912, and the Corporation had consistently supported the City Engineer's initiatives. Farrington's accomplishments, although often under the public radar, had lasting significance. Addressing comparisons with other cities, Tierney pointed out that Cork city's housing costs couldn't be measured against places like Liverpool, where materials were more accessible and cheaper, and the cost of living was lower. He also criticised the outdated housing plans still in use,

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which had remained unchanged for a decade and did not provide sufficient space for families. He called for future designs to prioritise space, leaving aesthetics for future generations to address. Mr. Boyd Barrett, B.E., also expressed his support. Mr. Jerh. Hurley added that overhead charges also contributed significantly to housing costs, and that the issue demanded a national inquiry. He agreed that economic rents were unrealistic under current municipal schemes, but argued that housing was a public service and some capital loss was inevitable. Ultimately, he concluded, providing decent housing for citizens was essential.⁴⁸

In September 1931, following the launch of the St. Joseph Utility Society's initiative to construct 32 semi-detached social housing units in Montenotte park, several dignitaries from the Catholic Church and Cork Corporation were present. With some units already being built, and the entrances to the site were blessed by the clergymen. Alderman and TD, Richard Anthony, praised the work of the society in alleviating the housing problem locally. Mr W. Byrne (Hon. Secretary of the Dublin Utility Society) also expressed hope at the event that the new Housing Bill would provide the necessary facilities to support the expansion of societies of this kind.

Mr. H. A. Pelly, Manager of the Hibernian Bank, shared with those present how confident he had felt in offering the necessary financial accommodation to the society. He remarked that he saw strong character and determination driving the society's efforts, and he knew both the builder and architect personally as men of

⁴⁸ *Cork Examiner* 24/8/1931

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absolute trustworthiness. He hoped that Deputies Anthony and Flynn would use their influence in the Dáil, once it reconvened, to ensure that the promised Housing Bill would offer even greater support than before for building homes for the people who needed them most. He noted that the example set by Messrs. O'Grants was one that could be well followed across the building trade. Mr. Barrett, the contractor, then expressed his thanks to the speakers for their kind remarks about him.

The Lord Mayor assured those present that, as far as he and the members of the city Corporation were concerned, nothing would be allowed to interfere with the development of social housing schemes in the City of Cork, or with efforts to advance them as much as possible. Mr. J. Barry, T.C., in seconding the motion, stated that the Society deserved not only the gratitude of the Mayfield parishioners but also that of the citizens of Cork city as a whole, for providing much-needed housing accommodation. Referring to Mr. Barrett's praise of his workers, Mr. Barry added that Cork's workmanship was second to none in the world. He joined in expressing best wishes for the Society's continued success. The City Engineer, in a brief address, remarked that the housing problem was unique among public issues and that societies such as this one were rendering excellent service in addressing it. The Chairman, of the subsequent luncheon (at the Victoria Hotel), Mr. Dinan, in response, expressed his thanks, and the proceedings then concluded.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ *Evening Echo* 10/9/1931

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As reported in a press editorial, in early December 1931, a motion had been tabled for that evening's meeting of Cork Corporation by the Lord Mayor, proposing the suspension of the City Manager. For some time, it had become apparent that relations between the City Manager and certain members of the Corporation had grown strained. While some degree of tension might have been expected in the workings of a large public body, it was deeply regrettable that such open hostility had developed—particularly between the City Manager and the Lord Mayor himself.

According to the article, the opposition of some members of the Corporation to the Cork City Management Bill remained difficult to understand. This legislation had transferred many of the routine, tedious responsibilities of municipal governance from Aldermen and Councillors to the City Manager. It appeared, however, that certain members viewed the Bill—which had effectively freed them from what had been perceived as “parish-level” politics and minor “favouritism,” as an affront to their personal authority, as well as their dignity. When members of the Corporation gathered that night, it would have been well for them to keep in mind that their foremost responsibility lay with the ratepayers. The City Manager had arrived in Cork city at a time when the city's finances were in dire condition. Within just a few years, the improvements brought about under his administration were, among many who had grown accustomed to the allegedly slow, cumbersome ways of corporate governance, almost miraculous.

Under his leadership, it was asserted that substantial housing schemes were implemented. The state of the

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city's streets had been dramatically improved, large-scale sewerage and water supply projects had been completed, and Cork city had achieved a high standard of cleanliness and maintenance. All of this had been accomplished without imposing excessive rates on citizens. Furthermore, a significant corporate loan had been successfully floated. The confidence of the public in subscribing to this loan, and the favourable terms secured from financial institutions, could be directly attributed to the City Manager's reputation for efficiency and sound financial management. The motion presented that evening was, in the writer's view, both petty and misguided. It was mentioned in the article that it could only have been justified if it were genuinely in the interest of the ratepayers, which, clearly, it was not. Even if passed, the motion would still have required approval from the Minister for Local Government before it could take effect, being an outcome that seemed highly improbable.⁵⁰

At a mid-December 1931 meeting of the Cork Corporation, a deputation from the Plasterers' Society, led by Mr. Hallinan, addressed the meeting. He explained that over thirty of his fellow members were currently unemployed, despite only fifteen or sixteen plasterers being engaged on the Turner's Cross housing scheme. He argued that there was enough work to employ more men. He also noted that four plasterers and one tiler had recently been brought in from outside, though three of them were later removed, thanks to the intervention of a City Councillor. The City Manager acknowledged that plastering progress on-site was slow and said he would raise the issue with the contractors.

⁵⁰ *Cork Examiner* 8/12/1931

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The Lord Mayor commented that Cork City was doing its best in relation to local housing efforts. Mr. Hurley responded that the resolution aimed to create a housing scheme on national lines and argued that local authorities could not solve a problem of such scale on their own. He formally moved the adoption of the resolution. The Lord Mayor asked whether it might be better to wait for the incoming Government to take up the issue, but Mr. Hurley said that it applied to any Government.⁵¹

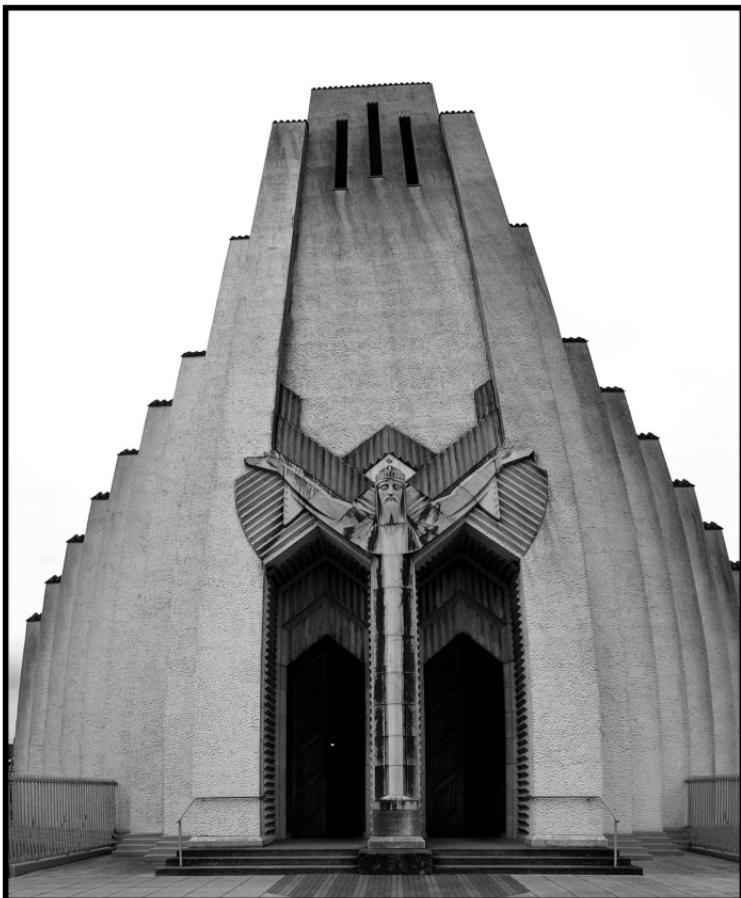
⁵¹ *Evening Echo* 16/12/1931

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Mr. Philip Monahan, the City Manager who would ultimately define the implementation of Cork city's social housing projects during this period.

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The Church of Christ the King, possessing an Art Deco style, was opened in 1931 to serve the growing Turner's Cross area. It was created by architect Barry Byrne, and sculptor John Storrs.
(Source: *Bjørn Christian Tørrissen, 2012*)

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Drawing of the Wycherley Housing Scheme by
Messrs Hill & Sons, for the Corporation of Cork,
dated May 1922.

(Source: 'Cork Examiner's' City Hall Drawings)

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CORK HOUSING SCHEME.



Mr. Philip Monahan, Commissioner for Cork City, has been developing an extensive housing scheme at Capwell. A number of houses are under course of construction, and more will be commenced shortly. Yesterday Mr. J. J. Walsh, Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, visited the site with Mr. Monahan, and expressed satisfaction with the progress of the work. Picture shows—(1) Morris, Walsh and Monahan inspecting the site. (2) Section of scheme approaching completion.

Work underway on the landmark Capwell Housing Scheme, Cork City

(Source: 'Cork Examiner' 7/6/1927)

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FROM TENEMENTS TO

TERRACES, 1932-1936

In January 1932, in the Supreme Court, before the Chief Justice, Mr. Justice Fitzgibbon, and Mr. Justice Murnaghan, the hearing concluded in the appeal brought by the defendants in the case of Kennan and Sons Ltd., Dublin, against the Housing Corporation of Great Britain Ltd. This appeal challenged the judgment previously issued by Mr. Justice Hanna in favour of the plaintiffs, to whom he awarded a decree for £652 5s 5d, along with costs, for work and labour carried out on behalf of the defendants. The case concerned the supply of fencing, wicket gates, and other materials in connection with the defendants' housing scheme at Douglas Road, Cork. In support of the appeal, it was argued that the judgment was contrary to the evidence presented, and that the defendants were not liable to pay the amount claimed until a certificate had been produced confirming that the money had been paid to the defendants themselves. Counsel for the appellants acknowledged that, as noted by members of the court, the defendants had received £900, but contended that this sum was unrelated to the contract in question. Furthermore, it was asserted that no certificate had been submitted to confirm the completion of the contracted work, and that insufficient evidence had been presented to justify the original judgment. In response, counsel for the respondents argued that there had been no complaints regarding the quality or execution of the work performed. The court dismissed the appeal, with costs awarded against the appellants.⁵²

⁵² *Cork Examiner* 22/1/1932

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At a meeting of the Cork Child Welfare League in March 1932, it was noted that Alderman Allen had expressed his satisfaction at the commencement of work on the site at Gurranabraher as part of the new housing scheme in the North-West area. He remarked that, in addition to the substantial employment the scheme would ultimately generate, it would also lead to the abolition of the slum houses in the locality. This, he said, would be a true blessing, and the displaced tenants from the area would be given first preference in the allocation of the new houses. He paid high tribute to the tireless efforts of Councillor J. V. O'Sullivan in advancing the scheme, and stated that the people of the old North-West Ward should never forget his dedication and work on their behalf. The members of the committee unanimously agreed with Alderman Allen's remarks and expressed the hope that this development marked only the beginning of a broader campaign to eliminate all slum areas in the city and provide proper housing for the working classes.⁵³

In April 1932, in response to a circular letter dated 3rd March 1932 from the Minister for Local Government and Public Health, which requested that Cork Corporation hold a special meeting to develop a housing programme for the city, the City Manager submitted a detailed proposal. The matter was discussed at a City Council meeting. The first part of the proposal focused on clearing unhealthy areas in the North-West Ward. It was suggested that 20 acres be cleared, requiring the demolition of approximately 550 houses. The area in question was bounded by Skeyes

⁵³ *Cork Examiner* 14/3/1932

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Lane, Kearney's Avenue, Cattle Lane, and Wolfe Tone Street, along with a smaller area bounded by St. Mary's Road, Looney's Lane, Beecham's Lane, and Wolfe Tone Street. The existing houses in these areas were mostly single-storey, two-roomed cottages in a poor state of repair, built closely together with little access to fresh air or sunlight. The streets were narrow and unevenly paved, and the area was heavily congested with slaughterhouses, tanneries, piggeries, and cattle sheds, making it highly insanitary. However, the nearby Griffin's Fields offered a practical opportunity.

It was noted that approximately 200 new houses could be built on this land before beginning demolition, allowing for a phased approach to relocation and redevelopment. Once the first set of new homes was built, the vacated properties could be demolished and replaced with new accommodation, repeating the process until the area was fully renewed—likely over a period of six years. The initial section proposed for clearance included the area bounded by Looney's Lane, St. Mary's Road, Beecham's Lane, and Wolfe Tone Street, along with part of Skeyes Lane.

The second part of the programme proposed the construction of 142 houses on a long-derelict site bordered by Bandon Road, Lough Road, Gould Street, and Green Street. The land had been unused for years, and Mr. Dominick O'Connor had already prepared the layout and house plans for the development. To proceed with these schemes, the Corporation needed to pass a resolution declaring the North-West Ward area a “Clearance Area” as per Section 5(1) of the Housing Act, 1931. This involved the preparation of detailed maps. Similarly, the Bandon Road project required a

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compulsory purchase order for land acquisition, also dependent on map preparation and ministerial approval.

Regarding financial assistance, the Government offered support for clearance schemes in the form of 30% of the annual loan charges for 15 years, followed by 20% for an additional 15 years. The maximum allowed cost for a house in such a scheme was £350, which would allow for an average weekly rent of about 7 shillings, inclusive of rates. For non-clearance housing schemes, the Government contributed 15% of the annual loan charges over a period not exceeding 20 years. In those cases, the maximum house cost was £400, with an average rent of 10 shillings per week including rates. Funding could be sourced from the Local Loans Fund, with repayments made over 35 years. As repayment amounts varied annually, the term “average rent” was used.

During the meeting, Alderman Allen commended the City Manager on the thorough report and raised the issue of triperies, asking what was planned for them. The Manager explained that many triperies existed because of the nearby slaughterhouses and might naturally disappear once the slaughterhouses were removed. Alderman Allen, however, argued that triperies were a separate industry and not dependent on slaughterhouses. Mr. O’Sullivan also praised the report but expressed concerns regarding compensation for those affected. The City Manager replied that compensation would depend on circumstances: houses deemed insanitary would be compensated at site value, while those in good condition could be purchased at market value. Alderman Horgan mentioned that there

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had been talk of dedicating surplus land for the construction of new triperies and suggested that the Manager investigate and report on that proposal. Finally, Mr. Hill remarked that the proposed rents—particularly for non-clearance schemes—seemed too high, raising concerns about affordability for potential tenants.⁵⁴

At a meeting of the General Purposes Committee of the Cork Corporation, which took place in mid-May 1932, an insightful discussion on housing took place. On the matter of housing, Alderman O'Leary proposed that a comprehensive survey be conducted on the city's slum areas in preparation for future housing developments. With funding potentially available, he felt the timing was ideal for such a survey. Mr. Hurley seconded this proposal, agreeing that they should aim to secure as much funding as possible to support both the unemployed and the wider needs of the city.

The City Manager then informed the committee that preparations were underway for the construction of 250 houses in the North-West Ward, and 140 on Bandon Road. He anticipated that they would be in a position to seek tenders for these 390 houses within six months. However, he advised against launching any additional housing schemes for at least a year. Regarding other projects, such as the development of main drainage, he considered this a suitable initiative to help relieve unemployment and said that preparations for such a scheme could begin. As for the suggestion of conducting a city-wide slum survey, he recommended a phased approach. Work had already commenced in the

⁵⁴ *Cork Examiner* 6/4/1932

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North-West, and any further surveys should focus on defined areas rather than adopting an overly broad strategy that might hinder current projects.

Mr. Sutton referred to a report in that day's Examiner about a housing scheme by Clonmel Corporation, which claimed to provide good-quality houses of three or four rooms for an economic rent of 3s 9d to 4s per week. He noted that Clonmel appeared able to build two houses for the price of one and suggested that Cork Corporation examine this model. The City Manager replied that plans and specifications for the North-West scheme had already been prepared and would soon be available for members to review. The architect had been instructed to keep house costs as low as possible, ideally around £300. Mr. Sutton then asked whether the City Engineer could visit Clonmel to inspect their housing scheme and assess its suitability for adaptation in Cork.

The City Manager responded that there were many factors to consider when designing housing and admitted he had only skimmed the article in question that morning. From what he could gather, the Clonmel houses were all single-storey. He assured the committee that the Housing Committee would be convened to examine the current plans, at which point any suggestions, including those from Clonmel, could be discussed. Mr. Ellis supported this approach, noting that allowing the Housing Committee to analyse and review specifications was the most effective method. He also reminded the committee that, following the North-West scheme, the Corporation had previously agreed to prioritise housing development in the Marsh area, where need was especially urgent. Sir John Fitzgerald

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endorsed the proposal to send the City Engineer to Clonmel, a suggestion that the Chairman confirmed had been noted by the City Manager.⁵⁵

A meeting of the Housing Committee of the Cork Corporation in late May 1932, with the Lord Mayor, Councillor F. Daly, presiding, the meeting, which was held in private, was convened to consider housing schemes for the North-West and South Wards of the city. A report of the committee's deliberations was to be submitted to the full Council of the Cork Corporation for consideration at a later date.⁵⁶

At a July 1932 meeting of the Cork Corporation, with Alderman Seán French presiding, a deputation from the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives appeared before the Council to urge that the housing schemes at Bandon Road and the North-West Ward be commenced without further delay. Their appeal was made in light of the pressing need to alleviate unemployment in the city. In response, the Chairman, following the advice of the City Manager, assured the deputation that there would be no unnecessary delay in proceeding with the schemes. It was further decided to apply for a provisional order to compulsorily acquire land on the Bandon Road sites, enabling the projects to move forward.⁵⁷

At another meeting of the Cork Corporation held that July, Alderman Sean French presided. A letter was read

⁵⁵ *Cork Examiner* 18/5/1932

⁵⁶ *Cork Examiner* 27/5/1932

⁵⁷ *Cork Examiner* 13/7/1932

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from the Department of Local Government and Public Health regarding the operations of Combined Purchasing, outlining the principal features of the scheme. Alderman Horgan remarked that local authorities should be empowered to purchase locally, provided the prices were equivalent. He believed this matter had been overlooked and that a degree of local option was necessary. The City Manager responded that local authorities did indeed have the power to purchase locally if advantageous terms were available.

Regarding the sale of the Turner's Cross houses, the City Manager reported that, after careful consideration, he had concluded it would be unwise to amend the existing terms of sale. He stated that any amendment at this stage would require a broader review of all Corporation lettings, likely resulting in financial loss. He noted that the occupants of these houses had the option to sell their interests at any time, and some had already done so, putting them in a more favourable position than most householders in the city. Mr. Hurley responded that the City Manager had failed to give a substantial reason why amending the terms would be unwise. He argued that the tenants' request, to extend the repayment period from 31 to 50 years, was reasonable. Approximately 25% of the house price had already been repaid through deposits and rent, meaning there was no financial loss. In fact, the total repayment would be made more quickly than if the Corporation were repaying it themselves. He urged that the request be granted.

Alderman Horgan supported Mr. Hurley, describing the proposal as reasonable and suggesting that the City Manager consult with the City Solicitor. He maintained

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that if there was the will, there would be a way. The Chairman proposed appointing a small committee to consult with the City Manager, stating that if the proposal could be arranged without financial loss, it should not be objected to. However, it would not be fair to impose any resulting loss on a single housing project. The City Manager noted that there was already a deficit on every housing scheme. Mr. Barry added that the request to extend the repayment period was unanimously supported by the tenants, and he was confident the City Manager would reconsider. Mr. Hurley agreed to the Chairman's proposal. The Chairman acknowledged that none of those present were particularly clear on the full implications. While sympathetic to the tenants' position, he believed greater clarity was necessary.

The City Manager concluded that the issue came down to whether the benefit of the contractor's exceptionally low tender should be extended to the city as a whole or limited to the 150 residents of the Turner's Cross houses. A committee consisting of Alderman French, Alderman Horgan, and Mr. Hurley was appointed to consult with the City Manager on the matter.

The Housing Committee submitted the following report, referring to the fact that they had reviewed plans and specifications for houses to be erected at Bandon Road, prepared by Mr. D. H. O'Connor, F.R.I.A.I. The committee recommended:

- Adoption of Plan No. 3 for four-roomed houses.
- Adoption of Plan No. 1 for three-roomed houses, with the lavatory located outside.

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- Amendments to the specification to allow for timber window frames instead of steel.
- That 25% of the houses to be built should be three-roomed types.

Estimated construction costs were as follows:

- Four-roomed houses: £348 for end units and £318 for intermediate units.
- Three-roomed houses: £330 for end units and £300 for intermediate units.

The total estimated cost for 142 houses was approximately £46,000.

In relation to the North-West Clearance Scheme, the committee recommended adopting the plans and specifications submitted by Mr. J. R. Boyd Barrett, M.R.I.A.I., again substituting timber for steel window frames. For blocks of eight or ten houses, the estimated average costs were:

- £305 for four-roomed houses.
- £285 for three-roomed houses.

With 25% of the 250 houses to be three-roomed, the total estimated cost came to £75,000. Alderman Allen inquired about the proposed rents, stating he required this information before construction commenced. Referring to recent remarks made in the Dáil regarding “cheap houses,” he noted that despite such promises, rents in Cork were currently set at 10s per week for some Corporation housing. Alderman Horgan added that the Dáil statement concerned only future intentions and not current practice. The City Manager

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explained that in the North-West Scheme, flat roofs had initially been specified. However, given the Government's notification that it would now bear two-thirds of the housing loan charges, he suggested they could afford more robust construction and proposed replacing flat bitumen roofs with slated ones.

In response to a query from Alderman O'Leary, the City Manager confirmed that rents would not exceed 5s per week. He estimated the added cost of slate roofs at about £20 per house. Mr. Hill proposed two amendments: that slate roofs be adopted and that the three-roomed house type be eliminated, with four-roomed houses being the designated minimum standard. However, Alderman Allen disagreed, advocating for the inclusion of three-roomed houses. He argued they were suitable for current one-room occupants and for elderly couples who required only two rooms and a kitchen.⁵⁸

At a city council meeting in August 1932, arising out of the report of the Public Works Committee, which noted that the work on the North-West housing site was almost complete, Alderman Horgan raised the issue of rent levels. He questioned whether it was fair for the costs of roads, sewers, and drainage to be included in the rents charged for these houses. Such infrastructure, he argued, should be financed by the ratepayers rather than by the tenants. Alderman Horgan pointed out that if a utility society were to approach the Corporation with a proposal to build 100 or 150 houses, contingent on the Corporation providing roads, drainage, and water supply, the Corporation would likely agree. In

⁵⁸ *Cork Examiner* 14/7/1932

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light of this, he asked whether the cost of such works had been factored into the rents for the Corporation houses.

The City Manager responded that approximately half of those costs were included. Alderman Horgan maintained that, in that case, a revision of the rents was warranted and suggested that the City Manager prepare a statement outlining the total costs and how much of those were being recovered through rent. He emphasised the financial strain on tenants, noting that for a man earning around £2 10s. or £3 weekly, paying 10s. rent represented a significant burden. The aim of the housing schemes, he said, was to improve public health, and investment in health saved money in the long term. He also proposed that local T.D.s advocate in the Dáil for Cork city housing schemes to benefit from the same sliding-scale allowances granted to private individuals constructing new homes. The City Manager agreed to prepare the detailed statement as requested.⁵⁹

At the meeting of the Cork and District Workers' Council held in September 1932, Mr. J. Hurley, N.T., T.C., presided as President. During the meeting, Mr. Anthony informed attendees that he had received a circular letter from one of the city's builders concerning the proposed housing scheme in the North-West Ward. He expressed a desire for members of the Building Federation to be present to support the claims made in the letter. According to the correspondence, the builder's tender had been significantly lower than the one ultimately accepted by the city Corporation.

⁵⁹ *Evening Echo* 3/8/1932

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Mr. Anthony stated that Corporation members had also received copies of the same letter. However, the City Manager had the final say in such matters. At the Corporation meeting held on the preceding Tuesday night, the City Manager had commented that if any contractor had a grievance, it was their responsibility to write directly to the Minister for Local Government and Public Health. If the facts in the letter were accurate, it would suggest that between £1,400 and £1,800 of public money had been needlessly given to a particular builder as an inducement. Mr. Anthony proposed that the builder in question submit a formal complaint to the Minister. The City Manager had acknowledged at the meeting that a lower tender had indeed been rejected in favour of a higher one. Councillor Barry strongly protested this decision, reiterating the Manager's advice that any contractor with a grievance should approach the Minister. It was further revealed that there were three separate builders whose tenders had been lower than those accepted for different sections of the project. If this were true, Mr. Anthony argued, then the City Manager owed the Minister, and the public, an explanation. He went on to say that the Workers' Council had publicly declared their commitment to securing housing for the people, and that, based on the figures presented, more houses could have been constructed for the same amount of money. The builder in question was reportedly willing to provide a £60,000 guarantee bond. Mr. Anthony emphasised that it was the duty of the Workers' Council to take the matter seriously; otherwise, he said, they would be acting dishonestly. He argued that the burden of response should not fall solely on individual builders. The Council, he believed, had a responsibility

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to act in the interests of the public and the building trade as a whole, as increased housing construction would result in greater employment.

A delegate suggested organising a public meeting to pressure the Government to remove Mr. Monahan from Cork and to restore the Corporation's full powers, ensuring a fair process for all. The Chairman noted that a motion was scheduled to be brought before the Labour Congress the following month aimed at curtailing Mr. Monahan's powers. Mr. J. Barry added that, in his experience, it was the first time in a public contract involving Cork Corporation that all tenders had not been transparently disclosed. The discussion in question had taken place during a private committee session the previous Tuesday and had not been made public. He clarified that his objection was not directed at any individual contractor, as he held all involved in equal regard and knew them to be reputable employers within the city. The Chairman concluded by stating that the final approval of tender acceptances rested with the relevant Minister.⁶⁰

At a quarterly full meeting of the Cork Corporation, Mr. Barry inquired about the reason for the delay in commencing the construction of houses in the North-East Ward. He asked when the contractor was expected to begin work. In response, the City Manager explained that several issues had complicated the start of the contract. Firstly, there was the matter of sureties; the relevant documents and bond details had been sent to the Insurance Committee, but their approval had not yet been received. Additionally, a new complication had

⁶⁰ *Evening Echo* 23/9/1932

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arisen regarding fluctuations in prices due to tariffs. The contractor had submitted a proposal in light of these changes, but upon review, the City Manager had found the terms unacceptable. This issue required further examination and had the potential to cause additional delays. According to the City Manager, these were the only two factors contributing to the holdup in initiating the project.⁶¹

In October 1932, at another meeting of the Cork Workers' Council, the Chairman, addressing the topic of the North-West Housing Scheme, acknowledged the growing unease among workers due to perceived delays in the project. He noted that during the week, the Committee had sent a deputation to meet with the City Manager and the builder, Mr. Barrett. Mr. Weldon, a member of the deputation, reported that he had interviewed both Mr. Barrett and the City Manager, Mr. Monahan. He expressed satisfaction that no undue delay had occurred regarding the housing scheme. The City Manager had explained that Mr. Barrett had to travel to England for one week. Before his departure, he had been attempting to secure an insurance company to act as guarantor for the completion of the scheme. Mr. Barrett had eventually arranged coverage through the Hibernian Insurance Company and was awaiting the final deeds before proceeding with the work.

The City Manager stated he had full confidence in Mr. Barrett but, given that he was relatively new to the building sector in Cork, the Corporation required a greater degree of assurance from him. The Manager saw no reason why work should not begin shortly. Mr.

⁶¹ *Evening Echo* 26/10/1932

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Barrett had also indicated that the City Manager had been very supportive of the project and that work would commence as soon as the insurance guarantee was formalised. Mr. T. Walsh, the other member of the deputation, confirmed Mr. Weldon's account and explained that the delay primarily stemmed from difficulties in securing an Irish insurance company to underwrite the bond. The contractor, however, had assured them he was ready to begin work once the insurance matter was resolved. Mr. Weldon added that it appeared the insurance had in fact been arranged through an Irish company. Mr. Good expressed surprise at the claim that no Irish insurance firm was willing to support the project, asserting that Irish companies were capable of handling any bond, regardless of size. He wished the contractor success in carrying out the scheme. The Chairman pointed out an inconsistency, noting that during a previous Corporation meeting, the City Manager had suggested the delay was related to tariffs. Now it appeared the issue concerned a bond, culminating in two, somewhat different, explanations. Mr. O'Callaghan remarked that the sooner the work commenced, the better. The Chairman echoed this, hoping that work would begin as soon as possible. Mr. Weldon clarified that from their conversation with Mr. Barrett, there was no indication he was bringing materials or support from England. Mr. Murphy concluded the discussion by saying that the deputation was also satisfied nothing was actively obstructing Mr. Barrett from proceeding with the work, with only matters beyond his immediate control. With this, the topic was closed, and the remainder of the committee's business proceeded as normal.⁶²

⁶² *Cork Examiner* 29/10/1932

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At the Town Clerk's office in Fitzgerald Park, Cork city, in January 1933, Mr. W. Ian Bloomer, Housing Inspector for the Department of Local Government and Public Health, conducted a public inquiry under oath. The inquiry concerned the Cork Corporation's application for confirmation of a compulsory purchase order, entitled "The Cork County Borough (Housing) Order, 1932," which would grant the Corporation authority to purchase land along the Lough Road for the construction of houses under the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890 to 1931. Several parties objected to the proposed acquisition of the building plots in question: Mr. W. Piper, an amusement proprietor; the Misses Hobbs, of 14 Lough Road; Timothy Keardon, of 36 Green Street; and Mary and Julianne Lynch, of 18 Lough Road. In attendance at the inquiry were the City Manager, Mr. P. Monahan; the City Solicitor, Mr. B. St. J. Galvin; and the City Engineer, Mr. Farrington.

The City Manager presented evidence in support of the application, explaining that the request was for confirmation of the Housing Order, 1932, authorising the Cork Corporation to compulsorily acquire four and a half acres of land at Bandon Road for building purposes. The city Corporation proposed to build approximately 140 houses on the land, addressing a need for an estimated 4,000 additional homes to accommodate the city's population. Since the estimate, 168 houses had been completed, and another 250 were under construction. Consequently, the need for the proposed 140 houses was urgent. The City Manager further clarified that much of the land involved was commonage and had been so for many years. Some of

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the adjoining gardens were inadequately fenced and open to trespass. These gardens were not actively cultivated, and the Corporation believed that taking part of them would not significantly inconvenience tenants or diminish the letting value of their properties. The houses proposed for acquisition were old and in poor condition, some of which had been demolished in recent years due to structural defects. The remaining properties were of inferior quality, and their demolition was necessary to maintain the integrity of the new housing scheme and provide proper accommodations for the residents.

The City Manager acknowledged the objections, stating that none were of such a nature as to warrant the abandonment or modification of the scheme. The Corporation was willing to withdraw its proposal to acquire 36 Green Street and part of the attached garden but was confident in seeking confirmation for the remaining areas. He contended that the objection from the amusement business owner, Mr. Piper, was not substantial, as the housing of people was of more immediate importance than the accommodation of amusements. The owners of properties on Lough Road had objected to the acquisition of parts of their gardens, but it was noted that the gardens were unusually large, and the remaining space would be adequate for an ordinary house. While the Corporation had no desire to cause harm to any individual, it was determined to proceed with the Housing Order. The land was the only suitable building site on the south side of the city, easily accessible from the city center. The City Manager argued that the provision of 140 family homes near their places of employment was of greater

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significance than the accommodation of fairgrounds and large garden spaces.

Mr. Wm. Murphy, solicitor for the Misses Annie and Cissie Hobbs of 14 Lough Road, presented their case. The four cottages proposed for demolition were very old and in poor repair, and his clients intended to rebuild modern houses on the site. The cottages were situated with a 7-foot bank at the rear of the yard, and his clients planned to provide a small garden area for each house where tenants could enjoy the outdoors. Mr. Murphy indicated that the Hobbs sisters were not opposed to the housing scheme but hoped to retain a large strip of land behind the houses if it could fit into the city Corporation's plans for the new housing development. In response, the City Solicitor, Mr. Galvin, confirmed that the Corporation was willing to accommodate the Misses Hobbs on the matter.

Evidence on the layout of the proposed development was given by Mr. S.W. Farrington, City Engineer. He addressed objections regarding the amount of land being taken from existing houses, explaining that the remaining land provided the same standard of space for small houses as the Corporation had given to similar houses in other parts of the district. Mr. Hobbs, the brother of the Misses Hobbs, testified that he managed the properties for his sisters, who owned seven houses on Lough Road. He explained that the four houses slated for demolition had only small yards, with a bank behind them. The proposed plan was to cut down the bank and provide a small garden for each of the four houses to be rebuilt. He suggested that if the Corporation allowed the retention of a 40-foot strip of land behind the houses, it would satisfy the objectors

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while still allowing the Corporation to retain 120 feet for their development. Mr. Murphy asked the representatives of the Corporation to reconsider the matter and see if an arrangement could be made. The Inspector assured Mr. Murphy that the Corporation would consider the request. Mr. Galvin agreed, noting that they would look into the issue and attempt to find a solution.

Mr. James McCabe, solicitor for Mrs. Ellen Beardon, appeared to object on her behalf. Mrs. Beardon had recently built a new house on the foundation of an old one and was concerned that the Corporation might take it from her. Mr. Galvin clarified that the Corporation had modified the scheme to avoid acquiring Mrs. Beardon's house and would only need to take a portion of her garden. Mr. McCabe argued that his client was aggrieved because the new house she had built, costing £350, would lose value if the Corporation took part of her garden. The new house was situated on land that the city Corporation intended to acquire.

The final objection addressed was that of Mr. William Piper, an amusement proprietor. Mr. E. Neville, solicitor for Mr. Piper, argued that Mr. Piper had been operating his amusement business on the Lough Road for over a century and had purchased the land after being a tenant. The proposed acquisition would force him to move again, and he argued that no other suitable site was available for his business in the city. Mr. Piper, testifying himself, explained the significance of his family's long-standing business in Cork city and the financial difficulty of relocating. Mr. Galvin explained that the Corporation faced similar challenges in securing land for housing and regretted any

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inconvenience caused to individuals. However, he asserted that the overall need for housing outweighed the impact on individual property owners. Despite the Corporation's understanding of Mr. Piper's situation, they maintained that the housing project needed to proceed.⁶³

A meeting of the General Purposes Committee of Cork Corporation was held in February 1933, and presided over by the Lord Mayor, Alderman Seán French. A deputation from the Cork Able-bodied Unemployed Association, consisting of the Chairman and two representatives, appeared before the Committee. The Chairman of the deputation pointed out that, according to press reports, Dublin had allocated two million pounds for housing schemes. In contrast, he claimed, Cork city had made little progress on the housing front, and the homes currently under construction were entirely beyond the reach of ordinary working men. He warned that in a few years Turner's Cross could become as large a slum area as any in Cork city, as people unable to afford the rents were resorting to subletting and taking in tenants.

Alderman Allen strongly rejected the claim that housing schemes were being delayed. He asserted that no one had done more for the unemployed than the City Manager, City Engineer, and the Corporation. He also maintained that Cork was ahead of Dublin in terms of slum clearance efforts. Regarding the North-West housing scheme, he reported that 60 labourers and 18 masons were employed on one section of the project. Councillor Barry, however, expressed concern

⁶³ *Cork Examiner* 14/1/1933

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over the relatively low number of workers engaged in the North-West scheme. He urged that contractors be asked to accelerate the pace of construction, noting that unemployment in Cork's building trade had never been more severe.⁶⁴

In March 1933, Mr. Seán T. O'Kelly, Minister for Local Government and Public Health, accompanied by Mr. E. P. McCarron, Secretary of the Local Government Department, and the Minister's Secretary, Mr. D. O'Donovan, spent a busy day in Cork city. He began an early inspection tour across various parts of the redeveloping city. The first location visited was the Corporation Housing Scheme in the North-West Ward. There, the Minister was joined by the Lord Mayor, Alderman S. French; Alderman S. O'Leary; Mr. P. Monahan, City Manager; Mr. C. Harrington, Town Clerk; and Mr. J. G. Geraghty, Local Government Inspector. The City Manager led the party through the network of streets that the Corporation planned to clear under its slum clearance scheme. At the building site, where over 250 houses were under construction, the visitors were welcomed by Mr. S. Farrington, City Engineer; Mr. J. R. Boyd-Barrett, Architect; and Dr. J. C. Saunders, City Medical Officer of Health. The Minister expressed great admiration for the location of the scheme, which stood high above the main city, offering excellent views and fresh air. The next stop on the itinerary was the new City Hall, where the Minister received a detailed explanation of the layout and purpose of the various departments within the extensive building project. From City Hall, the delegation proceeded to the Turner's Cross Housing

⁶⁴ *Cork Examiner* 23/2/1933

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Scheme. En route to the County Home, the Minister and his party also stopped to visit the new Church of Christ the King at Turner's Cross.⁶⁵

In May 1933, several reports were submitted by the City Manager, Mr. P. Monahan, to the a full meeting of Cork Corporation. Mr. Monahan requested permission from the Council to engage a Consulting Engineer to prepare a main drainage scheme for the city. He emphasised the urgency of such a scheme, noting that all sewer works should be designed to allow for the city's sewage to be discharged beyond its boundaries. He estimated that the cost of the project could start at £250,000 but suggested that it might be feasible to carry out the work in phases. He also pointed out that part of the funding could potentially come from unemployment relief funds.

A report from the Medical Officer of Health was submitted, identifying an area within the North-West Ward as an unhealthy area under the terms of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1931. Mr. Monahan informed the Council that if they were satisfied the conditions in the area could only be resolved through the demolition of buildings deemed unfit for human habitation, dangerous, or injurious to health, he would require authorisation to prepare a detailed map of the area in accordance with Section 5(1) of the Housing Act, 1930.

Mr. Monahan also sought the Council's approval for the construction of an additional 100 houses at Gurranabraher. These homes would follow the same

⁶⁵ Cork Examiner 29/3/1933

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design as those in the existing scheme of 251 houses and would act as an extension of that project. He recommended that these additional houses be used to increase the city's overall housing stock, rather than being allocated solely for slum clearance purposes.⁶⁶

An eloquent August 1933 editorial in the 'Cork Examiner' opined on the changing face of Cork City that, like all landscapes, it was claimed that this one offered a captivating variety, shifting in character with the changing time and weather. Yet, it consistently provided a broad expanse of rooftops, inviting quiet reflection. From this elevated vantage point, visitors could easily make out the small, distant forms of Shandon, St. Finbarr's, and other prominent buildings that, when viewed from below, appeared far more imposing. It was certain, the writer claimed, that many would be drawn to this area out of curiosity about the progress of the new housing scheme. And it was hoped that, after examining the buildings, they would take the opportunity to truly see Cork City in all its richness. Those who did would, without doubt, the writer claimed, find the experience worthwhile.⁶⁷

A meeting of working-class residents of Blackpool was held on an Autumn evening in the Glen Club Rooms, Spring Lane, with the purpose of formulating a housing scheme for the area. Several members of the Cork Corporation attended, including Alderman Allen and Councillors Hurley (N.T. and President of the Cork Workers' Council), Connolly, and Flynn. Mr. Boyd, who presided over the meeting, expressed his gratitude to the

⁶⁶ *Evening Echo* 31/5/1933

⁶⁷ *Cork Examiner* 26/8/1933

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several Corporation representatives that were present for accepting the invitation. He explained that the local organisation in Blackpool had been established specifically to advocate for a housing scheme. Many of the homes in the area, he said, were in appalling condition, some not even being fit for pigs. He noted that there was ample land available for development, including a 6½-acre site that could be used to improve housing conditions. The organisation's sixty members, many of whom lived in dire circumstances, were deserving of first preference in any proposed housing initiative.

Alderman Allen affirmed that he and his Corporation colleagues were committed to supporting efforts to improve Blackpool's living conditions. However, he emphasised that progress depended on securing a suitable site. He proposed that the local organisation form an executive committee to assess and recommend potential building locations in the district. He spoke highly of the City Manager, Mr. Monahan, and expressed confidence in his willingness to advance the scheme. Allen pledged his full support at the Council level and regretted that the Lord Mayor could not attend, noting that his presence would have added further strength to their cause. He described the housing conditions in Blackpool as deplorable and encouraged residents to act swiftly, as identifying a viable site would be a major step forward for the community. Councillor J. Hurley agreed, stating that the poor living conditions in Blackpool were undeniable. Many houses, he said, were entirely unfit for raising Christian families. Clearing the slum areas in Blackpool was just as essential as in any other part of the city. He pointed out that the Corporation held the

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power to act and that he would do everything possible to improve the situation. Two sites, in particular, he said, could be used for initial construction, which would not only provide better homes but also generate much-needed employment. He expressed confidence that the Corporation would respond appropriately and that further developments would be discussed at the next Council meeting. He assured the attendees of his and his colleagues' full support.

Councillor Connolly also stressed that suitable sites for housing development existed in Blackpool. He noted that many homes were in such poor condition that even a dog would not be fit to live in them. At a recent Corporation meeting, he had highlighted this issue. Based on his early impressions of the new City Manager, he felt confident that Mr. Monahan would visit the area and take action to support the residents who were so badly housed. From both a moral and Christian perspective, the current living conditions were unacceptable. Councillor Flynn echoed the urgent need to improve the lives of room dwellers in Blackpool. The attendance of sixty local men at the meeting, he said, was clear evidence of the seriousness of the issue. He identified a nearby orchard that the Corporation could acquire compulsorily for housing purposes and pledged his full support to the campaign. In closing, the Chairman reflected on the injustice of seeing housing improvements made in other parts of Cork while Blackpool had been overlooked. He thanked the Corporation members for their presence and commitment, and urged the local organisation to

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remain united in their efforts to secure redress and better living conditions for their community.⁶⁸

In a September 1933 city council meeting, in relation to the new housing scheme at Gurranabraher, Mr. Connolly proposed amendments to the names of several roads as originally suggested by the City Manager. He moved that “St. Anne’s Road” replace “Market Road,” “St. Vincent’s Street” replace “Fair Street,” and “Presentation Avenue” replace “Fair Avenue.” The motion was seconded by Mr. Daly and was approved by the Council. Alderman Allen then suggested that one of the new roads be named “Wolfe Tone Road.” However, it was pointed out to him that a thoroughfare bearing that name already existed within the city.⁶⁹

In late September 1933, at the St. Joseph's Commercial Society's site on St. Joseph's Drive, Cork City, the Rt. Rev. Monsignor Sexton, P.P., V.G., D.D., Dean of Cork, had solemnly blessed the eighteen houses that constituted the Society's latest housing project in the city. A distinguished gathering had attended the ceremony, including the Lord Mayor (Alderman S. French), the City Manager (Mr. P. Monahan), Senator J. C. Dowdall, Alderman Sean O'Leary, Mr. W. F. O'Connor, solicitor, and others.

Monsignor Sexton, assisted by Rev. Fr. O'Sullivan, C.C., and Rev. Fr. Canty, C.C., had blessed the buildings before Mr. C. Blahoay had invited the Lord Mayor to perform the official opening. He had

⁶⁸ *Cork Examiner* 1/9/1933

⁶⁹ *Evening Echo* 27/9/1933

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presented Alderman French with a golden key for the occasion, and amidst applause, the Lord Mayor had stepped forward to open the door of one of the houses. Before this, Alderman French had addressed the large crowd, expressing his appreciation for the Society's invitation to the event. He had also praised the work of this particular Committee, highlighting their success in constructing such a well-equipped block of houses both inside and out. This development had been the second successful housing scheme completed by the St. Joseph's Society. The eighteen semi-detached residences had been located in a healthy position on a plot of land off Gardiner's Hill. Each house had featured both front and back gardens, adding to the overall appeal of the development. A special roadway had been constructed for the project when work first began, and every exterior detail of the houses had, he claimed, reflected the high standard of workmanship.

It was claimed that what had made this project unique was that the Society had not hired contractors to carry out the work but had instead engaged individual firms to complete each section of the houses. The cost of building each residence, fully completed, had amounted to £750, a sum that demonstrated the exceptional success of the Committee's efforts. Two of the houses had been specially fitted and furnished for the opening event, with the collaboration of three firms: the Munster Arcade, Messrs. Cash and Co., and the Electricity Supply Board. Visitors to the event had been able to inspect these two homes and appreciate how charming the fully furnished and fitted-out houses had looked when completed.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ *Cork Examiner* 28/9/1933

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By November 1933, a new city Corporation housing scheme involving the site then occupied by Wyse's Hill Distillery had generated considerable interest in the city. In an interview with the '*Cork Examiner*,' Mr. P. Monahan, the City Manager, stated that negotiations with the owners of the site were still ongoing and that a purchase price had yet to be finalised. However, it was hoped that the negotiations would be concluded within the following week or fortnight. According to Mr. Monahan, the new plans provided for the immediate construction of 200 houses, with a further 200 to follow at a later stage. Before work could commence, the existing distillery buildings and chimney shaft at Wyse's Hill would need to be demolished. A new road was also planned in the vicinity of the weir, which was then located at the top of the distillery grounds. This road would be cut through to provide access into Wyse's Hill. The scheme was undertaken with the objective of clearing several of the overcrowded areas surrounding Sheares Street and the Marsh district.⁷¹

Following the New Year of 1934, in an interview with a journalist from the '*Evening Echo*,' Mr. Philip Monahan, the City Manager of Cork Corporation, provided an overview of the city's housing situation. He highlighted how landowners had taken advantage of the demand for housing by charging excessive ground rents. He noted that once funds for house purchases, which were then exhausted, became available again, advances were likely to be restricted for cases where ground rents or purchase prices were deemed unreasonable.

⁷¹ *Cork Examiner* 13/11/1933

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Monahan proposed that a potential solution to the housing crisis in the city centre could involve reducing overcrowding in existing homes and making structural adjustments to accommodate two or more families per house. He indicated that stricter enforcement of sanitary regulations would be implemented and that inspections of all rented properties would soon take place. The work of Public Utility Societies was also reviewed. While their housing projects were solid, the designs were generally conservative, and the exterior was described as somewhat monotonous. However, some of the most innovative designs were noted in houses built by the Richmond Public Utility Society in Ashburton. The St. Joseph's Public Utility Society, the oldest society, was commended for being the only one still building houses for rent.

At that time, he noted, the city Corporation was constructing 106 houses in Gurranebraher and was preparing to build 86 more houses at Dandon Road, which would help clear some of the worst areas. Additional plans were in place to address overcrowding in the city centre and to begin projects in the Blackpool area. The Government had committed to a generous program of financial assistance to clear slums within five years, and it had been emphasised that public utility societies building houses for rent could access significant government support, including grants and low-interest loans. Monahan also addressed the challenge of building in the city centre, where three-story flats were too costly. He suggested that the solution could involve adjusting existing homes to accommodate more families, a method that would reduce costs while avoiding the need for new infrastructure like schools and churches. Finally, he noted that sanitary regulations

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would be strictly enforced in the coming year, with particular attention paid to the condition of tenement properties.⁷²

In February 1934, an editorial in the '*Cork Examiner*' declared that, perhaps the most pressing need in Cork city was the housing of the poorer classes in homes that promoted healthier living, as compared to the old, unhygienic houses, where less fortunate members of the community had been forced to live until recent years. By this time, as the paper noted, the North West Ward housing scheme was well on its way to completing its first block of 254 houses, and within a few weeks, those houses were expected to be occupied. The City Manager, Mr. Philip Monahan, had previously discussed the issue of slum clearance in detail during an interview, addressing the most important aspects of the situation. One key point that Monahan had emphasised was the value of building good houses, rather than merely cheap ones. This was reportedly something builders and contractors working on schemes throughout Cork city had paid close attention to, ensuring that all buildings were constructed with durability, comfort, and the best materials, even if they cost more than inferior products. When discussing slum clearance, Monahan shared the plans the Cork civic administration had in place to clear the city's old, unsuitable houses, particularly in residential areas where poorer classes lived.⁷³

Following the celebration of High Mass at the North Cathedral on St. Patrick's Day, 1934, the new housing

⁷² *Evening Echo* 9/1/1934

⁷³ *Cork Examiner* 28/2/1934

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development in Cork's North-West Ward was formally blessed by the Most Reverend Dr. Daniel Cohalan, Bishop of Cork. The ceremony drew a crowd of several thousand citizens, who watched as His Lordship blessed the new homes from a platform at the centre of the housing scheme and delivered an inspiring address. Speeches were also given by the Lord Mayor and the City Manager. Outside the Cathedral, three troops of St. Patrick's Boy Scouts, led by Scoutmaster J. P. Cotter, formed a guard of honour with troop flags and Papal emblems. The Bishop and accompanying clergy passed through their ranks. The Butter Exchange Brass and Reed Band and the Farrenferris Boys' Band (of Fair Lane) were stationed outside the Cathedral and led the ceremonial procession. The procession moved through Dailey's Lane, Wolfe Tone Street, and Emmet's Lane en route to Farranferris, the site of the housing scheme. Members of Cork Corporation and the Harbour Board, in full regalia and accompanied by their respective chief officials, followed in formal procession behind the clergy. Along the route, the bands alternated in playing hymns. A large crowd had gathered at the site. His Lordship ascended the platform and solemnly blessed the entire estate, with all present standing reverently, heads uncovered.

After the blessing ceremony, Bishop Cohalan addressed the assembled crowd. He thanked the Lord Mayor, members of the Corporation, and the Harbour Board for their presence at what he described as a meaningful event befitting St. Patrick's Day. He remarked that after fulfilling their religious duties in church, nothing could be more pleasing to God or to St. Patrick, than the commencement of a project that would move the poor and devout from overcrowded and dilapidated districts

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into dignified new homes. Reflecting on the area's history, His Lordship noted that parts of the nearby lanes dated back over 100 years, and many of the original houses were built under a former, unreformed, and exclusively Protestant-run Corporation. He pointed out that, in those times, Catholics, no matter how upstanding they were, would not have been permitted membership in the city Corporation. He made this observation not polemically, but to underscore the broader global issue of urban poverty, citing Dublin, London, and other cities that had long grappled with similar slum conditions. Bishop Cohalan acknowledged that the Corporation had since undergone reform and had made efforts to improve housing conditions across the city, notably through schemes like Barrett's Buildings. However, he asserted that nothing previously done for the working classes in Cork city compared to the scale and vision of the current scheme. Unlike previous efforts, this development, he said, was genuinely aimed at clearing slums and demolishing homes unfit for habitation. The newly built houses represented real, worthy homes for Catholic working men and women, and he expressed great joy at being present to inaugurate the initiative. He praised the Lord Mayor, City Manager, architects, builders, and all members of the Corporation for their work, describing the project as a shining example of Christian social action. He concluded by offering his congratulations and blessings to those responsible and extended his hopes that the families moving into these homes would live in this location happily, and with God's continued favour.

The Lord Mayor noted that it had become customary on St. Patrick's Day for the representatives of the

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people to offer their loyalty and devotion to the Faith and to the Bishop as its spiritual leader. He remarked that this year's gesture was made all the more significant by the impressive public ceremony they had just witnessed. Speaking on behalf of the citizens, the Lord Mayor conveyed deep affection and gratitude to the Bishop, praying that he would be long spared to guide the spiritual life of the community. He observed that the residents of the area had given what he believed to be one of the finest examples of true citizenship he had witnessed in his time in public service. He expressed sincere appreciation for this, adding that if the Bishop could be said to have any one fault, it was his extraordinary devotion to the poor and those less materially endowed, a devotion that had inspired and uplifted the entire city.⁷⁴

In a March 1934 feature in the '*Cork Examiner*,' a very detailed and insightful outlook on slum clearance and housing projects in the city was conveyed. The newspaper editorial reflected on how, despite all the progress made towards the comforts and securities of life, many families were still compelled by circumstance to live in conditions barely removed from those of the cavemen. It noted that it had not been until the 19th century that a Royal Commission in Great Britain had formally addressed the provision of housing through State aid, with the goal of eliminating slums. Since then, attention had steadily turned towards solving the grave problem of urban squalor. In the subsequent decades, a great collective effort had taken shape to materially improve living conditions. The newspaper commended the Irish Government, which had from the

⁷⁴ *Evening Echo* 17/3/1934

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outset tackled this challenge with enthusiasm, and pointed to the progress evident in cities like Cork City as proof of these efforts. The editorial marked the solemn blessing by the Bishop of a completed section of a major housing scheme, which the paper regarded as one of the most significant measures yet taken to provide decent accommodation for the city's working-class residents. Located in Gurranebraher, an elevated area well-known for its fresh air and previously wholesome environment, the new red-roofed houses were seen as offering a fresh start for many families previously confined to overcrowded and unhealthy dwellings.

According to the newspaper, these families were being relocated from nearby areas designated for slum clearance. The editorial underscored the commitment of Cork Corporation to such projects, noting that while the Corporation had already completed multiple housing schemes across the city, this one stood out as particularly ambitious. By November 1932, plans had been finalised for the Gurranebraher estate, and construction on the initial 250 houses had begun. The newspaper described how the development process, including land preparation, contract negotiations, and logistical challenges—had naturally required time. Initially, local residents had viewed the activity with uncertainty, but gradually came to understand that these efforts were being undertaken for their benefit. Their interest and investment in the emerging homes grew accordingly. A key concern, according to the editorial, was the question of rents. The newspaper explained that this issue had been discussed extensively by the city Corporation, before being resolved by the City Manager through the introduction of a sliding

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scale system. Under this model, rents would be adjusted according to tenants' incomes—ensuring fairness and accessibility. The editorial argued that the success or failure of the scheme largely hinged on this decision. On the employment front, the newspaper highlighted the scheme's significance as a source of both direct and indirect jobs. The construction effort had employed approximately 300 workers, providing a timely economic boost during a period of widespread joblessness. The supply chain also benefitted, as a wide range of materials and services were required for a development of this scale. The editorial expressed satisfaction that the majority of these supplies were sourced locally, supporting Cork's own industries. The newspaper went on to name key contributors to the scheme. Architect J.R. Boyd Barrett, based on South Mall, had designed the houses, while construction was carried out by Messrs. Murray and Lane, and Mr. E. Barrett. The editorial praised their work, echoing the favourable remarks made by the Bishop during a prior visit to bless the foundation stone of new schools in the same area. Special recognition was given to Very Rev. Canon Cohalan of the Cathedral Parish, under whose jurisdiction the scheme fell.

The editorial listed several local firms that had supplied fittings and materials: Messrs. Eustace and Co. (bathroom and fireplace fittings), Messrs. E.H. Harte & Co. (suppliers of the waterproofing compound "Sika"), and the Cork Tile Co., who provided 300,000 roofing tiles and 2,500 tons of Portland cement. The ironwork—including gates and railings—was completed by Messrs. J. Swan of Knapps Quay. Lime, sand, and gravel were supplied by Magner's Lime Works, while fibrous plaster and other interior fittings came from

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Messrs. J. O'Callaghan and Sons. The newspaper drew attention to a local innovation used in the project, such as window fasteners invented by Mr. F. Mullins of Boreenmanna Road. These mechanisms, which eliminated the need for traditional ropes and weights, had been well received across Ireland and were now included in municipal housing schemes. For cast iron goods such as ranges and rainwater systems, the editorial noted that both Hammond Lane Foundry (Dublin) and Drogheda Ironworks were involved, the latter offering robust and user-friendly products. Another innovation noted was the use of glazed concrete kitchen sinks by the Birr Artificial Stone and Concrete Co., Ltd.—a new development in domestic design. The editorial commended the use of Irish-made paints and varnishes from Messrs. Harrington, Goodlass and Wall, a company known for its quality products. It also emphasised the importance of proper lighting and cooking facilities, provided under contract by the Cork Gas Consumers' Co., which had installed gas stoves in every home—an innovation that many tenants would be experiencing for the first time.

On the subject of sanitation, the newspaper praised the inclusion of a galvanised iron dust-bin for each house, supplied by Messrs. J. Gibson and Co., Kyrl's Quay. Concrete blocks were provided by Mr. John A. Wood (Carrigrohane), Mr. W. Roberts (Riverstown), and the Blarney Sand, Gravel, and Tile Co. Additional contributions came from Cork Iron and Hardware Co., Ltd., and Messrs. Robert Scott & Co., who supplied general hardware and rainwater systems. In conclusion, the editorial presented the Gurranebraher housing scheme as a comprehensive and community-focused effort, which not only provided much-needed

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accommodation but also supported local industry, innovation, and employment. It regarded the initiative as a milestone in Cork City's ongoing battle against urban deprivation, and a model of what could be achieved through coordinated civic and governmental action.⁷⁵

At an April 1934 meeting of the Cork Workers (Trades Union) Council, concerning the forthcoming Bandon Road Housing Scheme, Mr. O'Connell, a committee member, expressed the hope that local labour would be employed in the construction of the new homes. In response, the Chairman advised that the most effective course of action would be to entrust the matter to the Labour members of the Corporation. He expressed confidence that those members would do everything within their power to ensure local workers were given due consideration. This proposal was unanimously agreed upon by the members present.⁷⁶

The '*Evening Echo*' reported in late April 1934 that the success of the Cork Postal Employees' Utility Housing Society's initial venture in house production encouraged the organisation to expand its efforts. Following the completion of their first housing scheme, they embarked on a second project, consisting of sixteen modern-style dwellings located in Montenotte Park. This site had been chosen due to its elevated position above the city, offering residents fresh, invigorating air, making it highly desirable for residential purposes for many years. The Cork Postal Employees' Utility Housing Society was composed of members of the

⁷⁵ *Cork Examiner* 19/3/1934

⁷⁶ *Cork Examiner* 7/4/1934

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Postal Workers' Union, with Mr. W. Norton, T.D., the union's General Secretary, as well as leader of the Irish Labour Party, providing guidance for the establishment of this society. The success of the housing projects in Dublin, which the Union had undertaken, inspired similar efforts in Cork city, and there were plans to extend the concept further, with more Post Office Housing Societies across the country.

Given the high cost of building materials and construction, the price of the sixteen houses under construction at Montenotte Park came as a pleasant surprise. Each house was sold for £610, which was regarded as a remarkable price considering the modern style and features incorporated into the dwellings. The houses, originally planned before construction started, had already attracted buyers, and now that the homes were nearly completed, the purchasers were even more satisfied with their homes. Each house featured a sitting room, dining room, kitchenette, three bedrooms, and a bathroom. Modern amenities such as hot and cold water installations, gas and electric cooking options, and a spacious hallway were included. The houses were semi-detached and came with side driveways that could be used for garages. Additionally, they included front and rear gardens. The houses were designed with practicality and comfort in mind, with high-quality fixtures, including chromium-plated taps and modern kitchen fittings. The houses were designed by the renowned Cork architect Mr. J. Barry, who had previously worked on various housing schemes in the city. Mr. G. Hosford, the builder, had significant experience in the field, having overseen building projects in other parts of the world. Notably, he had also invented a patented concrete manhole cover, now

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approved by the Cork Corporation. The concrete blocks and roofing tiles for these houses were supplied by Messrs. W. Ellis and Son, a well-established Cork firm.

A model house had been furnished to showcase the potential of these homes. The house had been completely furnished by Messrs. Cash and Co., located on Patrick Street. The model house was open for inspection from Sunday, the 22nd, to the following Sunday, daily from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., and on Sundays from noon to 10 p.m. The interior featured modern yet cozy furnishings, including durable, damp-proof steel enamelled cupboards in the kitchenette, and transparent waterproof curtains that allowed light to enter while being easy to clean. The two main bedrooms were furnished with double-sized suites in a new rubbed oak finish. The total cost for furnishing the model house was £125, which was considered very affordable, especially given that 90% of the furnishings were Irish-made, and they met high standards of quality and style. This project reflected the continued commitment of the Cork Postal Employees' Utility Housing Society to provide affordable, modern housing with quality design and construction, setting a benchmark for future housing initiatives. This opinion, presented in a newspaper editorial, praised the society's successful efforts and highlighted the value of such initiatives in meeting the growing demand for quality, affordable housing.⁷⁷

By June 1934, around thirty houses in the new North-West Ward housing scheme were officially occupied by

⁷⁷ *Evening Echo* 20/4/1934

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families relocated from older dwellings on the northern side of the city. The transfer of furniture and other household belongings took place using a mix of handcarts, carts, as well as various other vehicles. Corporation officials were present throughout the process to oversee and assist with the smooth transition into these new homes.⁷⁸

At the July 1934 meeting of the Cork Trades Union Council, the Chairman raised concerns regarding the unexplained delay in the Bandon Road Housing Scheme. For several weeks, no progress had been made, and the cause of the hold-up remained unclear. During this period, members of the building trade were left idle, despite the fact that the project could provide much-needed employment. Mr. Barry, contributing to the discussion, stated that he understood several houses were planned to be built. However, work had been initiated approximately five or six weeks earlier, only to be halted abruptly. He expressed concern for the workers, who each morning walked to the Bandon Road site in the hope of being employed, only to find they were not being taken on.⁷⁹

In September 1934, a newspaper editorial highlighted that, although a considerable amount had been accomplished in recent years to tackle the severe overcrowding of Cork City's slum districts, the newspaper editorial acknowledged that only the surface of the problem had been addressed. The urgent need for a comprehensive slum-clearance scheme remained obvious to anyone familiar with the existing conditions.

⁷⁸ *Cork Examiner* 8/6/1934

⁷⁹ *Cork Examiner* 13/7/1934

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Yet, while this necessity was widely accepted, the editorial noted that finding a viable solution to such a complex issue demanded extensive study and long-term planning. This was a matter to which the City Manager, Mr Philip Monahan, had devoted significant attention. That week, the public had been made aware that tenders were being invited by the Corporation for the construction of 170 new houses at Spangle Hill—on the outskirts of Blackpool and the northern fringe of the city. To the average citizen, the announcement of 170 houses might have seemed a modest response to the broader problem of inner-city overcrowding. However, the editorial explained that this development represented only a fraction of a much more ambitious and far-reaching plan being prepared by the City Manager and his team. Behind the scenes, elaborate planning had been underway for quite some time, and the results were now beginning to take shape.

As part of what was referred to as the North City Development Scheme, a comprehensive survey had been conducted on a large area of land adjoining the city's northern boundary. Engineers and architects had carried out their work discreetly, and their efforts had culminated in a set of definitive plans for what promised to be one of the largest municipal housing schemes ever undertaken in Ireland. The 170 houses currently being planned were merely the initial phase of a vision that would ultimately provide over 2,000 new homes in the area. The estimated cost—ranging from £220 to £260 per house—meant that the total expenditure would approach half a million pounds. The newspaper editorial pointed to this financial scale as a clear indicator of the magnitude and ambition of

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the undertaking. It further noted that the proposed development would include not only housing but also a central park and a new church, underscoring the project's comprehensive nature.

In an interview with a staff member of the '*Cork Examiner*,' City Manager, Mr Philip Monahan, provided additional context and clarified public understanding of the scheme. He stated that the description of the 170 houses at Spangle Hill, referred to as North City Development Scheme No. 1, had perhaps been overly optimistic. While it was true that a full survey had been conducted on land behind the North Monastery and Farranferris—spanning from Fair Hill to the Commons Road, and from St Mary's Road to the old Fair Green—the immediate goal was not to build 2,000 homes at once. Rather, the purpose of the survey was to ensure that nothing undertaken in the present would obstruct future expansion and development.

Mr Monahan explained that the Corporation had been actively pursuing a comprehensive slum-clearance plan, and that the survey on the north side of the city formed part of the broader effort to identify suitable sites. At first glance, the development of land on the city's periphery might not have seemed directly connected to the problem of overcrowding in central areas, such as Shandon Street to Mulgrave Road, or other parts of the city's Northside. Consequently, some public concern had arisen that the needs of the inner city were being overlooked. However, the editorial emphasised the City Manager's rationale: the only practical way to ease inner-city congestion was to gradually shift populations outward—re-housing families just a short distance from their current locations, but into far healthier and less

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cramped surroundings. In essence, Mr Monahan argued that Cork city's housing crisis could not be solved without first expanding the city's residential footprint. The editorial concluded by noting that, at present, the Corporation had only been granted approval for the construction of the 170 houses. However, the forward-thinking approach of surveying land and planning for larger-scale development was a necessary and strategic step towards achieving a lasting solution to the city's housing and slum problems.⁸⁰

At a meeting of the Cork City branch of the Industrial Development Association in 1934, a letter was read from the Cork and District Workers' Council enclosing a resolution, unanimously adopted at a recent meeting, urging the Minister for Local Government and Public Health to direct all public authorities to use bricks, where available, for housing schemes. The resolution cited the dual benefits of brick use: providing essential employment in brick manufacturing and offering a more suitable material for house construction.

Mr. Walsh, who moved the adoption of the resolution, noted that Cork city had once supported five operational brickworks. He was pleased to report that two are now active: the Ballinphellic Brickworks, recently reopened by Mr. Barrett, and the Youghal Brickworks, revived under Mr. Smyth. While he did not have exact figures on the prevailing brick prices, he emphasised that broader use would depend on setting rates at a reasonable level. He argued that expertise was not required to observe the superior quality of bricks compared to concrete blocks, particularly in terms of

⁸⁰ *Cork Examiner* 6/9/1934

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weather resistance and durability. Many older homes in Cork city, constructed with Douglas slob bricks, remained standing as testament to their long-term resilience. Mr. Walsh urged the Association to support the resolution and to prioritise the use of locally made bricks in future Corporation housing developments. He pointed out that in London and other parts of England, the use of bricks, especially coloured or decorative varieties, was on the rise in housing schemes. While the initial cost of bricks might be higher, the long-term savings were notable. He suggested that price reductions could be achieved by establishing urban supply depots for bricks produced at more distant sites, thereby reducing recurring transport and delivery charges. The Chairman recalled a discussion with Mr. Smyth at a sub-committee meeting concerning the reopening of the Youghal brickworks. Mr. Smyth had estimated that the cost difference between concrete blocks and bricks would be approximately equal. The Chairman agreed that bricks should be made available at a competitive and sustainable price. Mr. Merrick also supported the resolution, noting that his experience had shown distinct advantages in using bricks over concrete blocks, both structurally and in terms of interior comfort across seasonal extremes. Mr. O'Sullivan added that, if given a fair chance, bricks could be priced competitively with concrete.

Alderman Anthony, addressing the resolution, proposed a slight amendment. Rather than calling directly on the Minister to mandate brick use, he suggested requesting the Department to examine the feasibility of using bricks in housing schemes. While he admitted limited expertise in the brick industry, he acknowledged Mr. Walsh's greater familiarity and posed a question: could

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local production supply between five and ten million bricks annually? For example, how many bricks would be needed daily for a scheme of 500 houses? Mr. Walsh responded that the exact requirements would depend on house type and size, but expressed confidence that, with sufficient support and encouragement, local brick production could soon reach such volumes. Alderman Anthony welcomed Mr. Walsh's assurance but raised a caution based on his experience with other building materials. He noted that Irish slates, for instance, were often unavailable when needed, forcing developers to resort to alternative domestic roofing materials. The Chairman agreed, stating that at a time when demand for Irish slates was lower, local options could have been used more widely, but architects had been reluctant to specify them.⁸¹

According to the '*Cork Examiner*,' in December 1934, a powerful statement on the issue of exorbitant rents, delivered by the Most Rev. Dr. Cohalan, Bishop of Cork, during his address at the annual prize draw of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, resonated strongly with the public. His Lordship's remarks drew attention to the scandalous exploitation faced by the less fortunate in society, individuals who, despite living in a Christian community, were subjected to rack-renting that pushed them to the brink of destitution.

Dr. Cohalan condemned the system that allowed slum-landlords and sub-letters to extort excessive charges for substandard accommodation, often single rooms in poor condition, and without consequence. These unscrupulous practices, he said, preyed upon the needs

⁸¹ *Evening Echo* 29/10/1934

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of the impoverished and denied them the basic necessities of life. The Bishop's timely intervention, the article asserted, had cast renewed light on the housing crisis and the moral responsibility borne by society at large. While the city Corporation's efforts to provide adequate housing for the working classes had been met with criticism by some ratepayers, many of whom either misunderstood or overlooked the daily struggles of the city's poorest, His Lordship's comments served to reaffirm the essential nature of such initiatives.

The housing schemes, criticised in some quarters for their cost, had a deeper justification beyond aesthetics or urban development. While the removal of slum areas was desirable to improve public health and eliminate urban blight, the primary motivation remained the humane and Catholic-Christian duty to ensure that every worker and their family could live in dignity. Cork city, in this regard, had not fallen short. The city had demonstrated a strong sense of civic duty and responsibility in addressing the housing issue, and Bishop Cohalan's remarks offered further endorsement of the work already undertaken, while also challenging all to redouble their efforts in confronting unjust practices, and supporting the vulnerable.⁸²

In January 1935, the '*Cork Examiner*' reported that the new city Corporation housing scheme on the Bandon Road made very satisfactory progress since work had commenced in the area in early September of the previous year. The 86 houses, which were under construction, were expected to be ready for habitation by July. The scheme provided considerable employment

⁸² *Cork Examiner* 13/12/1934

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in the district, as, in addition to the actual building of the new dwellings, no less than ten houses were demolished to complete the project.⁸³

In March 1935, at a meeting of the Cork Trades' Union Council, at which Mr. J. Hurley presided, Mr. Barry, a committee member, stated that he wished to draw the Council's attention to the situation regarding the social Housing Scheme on the Bandon Road. Government schemes had been launched to address both the housing problem and, equally important, to alleviate unemployment. With all due respect to those involved, he noted that the workforce on the housing project at the time was far from adequate. He suggested that the Council write to all parties concerned, urging them to expedite the work and provide employment to some of the workers who were currently unemployed and walking the streets. Mr. O'Donovan referred to the scaffolding erected outside a shop on Patrick Street, noting that the poles were beginning to rot due to being left in place for so long. He hoped that the scaffolding would either be removed or that workers could be assigned to dismantle it. Mr. Weldon commented that the scaffolding was an eyesore in the principal street of the city, and expressed hope that the Corporation would address the issue.⁸⁴

At an April 1935 meeting of the General Purposes Committee of the Cork Corporation, with the Lord Mayor presiding, Mr. Connolly asked the City Manager who would be transferred to the new houses at Gurranabraher. The City Manager responded that the

⁸³ *Cork Examiner* 18/1/1935

⁸⁴ *Evening Echo* 8/3/1935

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people to be transferred would be those remaining in the old Clearance Order area who had not yet been accommodated. "A number of them are in Wolfe Tone Street," the City Manager added. Mr. Connolly said he understood that the people to be transferred were those from parts of Ballymacthomas, Glenryan Avenue, and Kearney's Avenue. Some people had told him that it was people from Broad Lane who were going to be moved there, and they were in an awful condition about it. Mr. Daly, a member of the Corporation, added, "I live in Kearney's Lane, and I cannot get a house."

In reference to another item in the same section, which proposed that Messrs. McLeagher and Hayes be paid the balance of £500 due to them for their Evergreen Road housing contract, less a £100 deduction for the use of foreign lead, Mr. Buckley asked whether there was a stipulation in the contract that the contractor would be fined £100 for using foreign lead. The City Manager replied negatively, adding that they had found that the proscribed lead was not used. The clause was somewhat obscure, and no serious blame was attached to anyone.

Under the heading of Law and Finance, a record was made of the approval granted by the Munster and Leinster Bank for a loan of £180,000 for the temporary financing of housing schemes and the construction of the City Hall, pending the issue of new redeemable stock. The City Manager, in response to a query about any changes to the plans for the 106 houses to be built at Spangle Hill, said that each house would have a bathroom.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ *Cork Examiner* 11/4/1935

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In May 1935, applications were invited from competent individuals for the position of Clerk of Works in connection with Corporation housing schemes. The salary offered was £5 per week.⁸⁶

In August 1935, a newspaper article opined that the determined efforts of the Cork City Manager, Mr. Philip Monahan, to eliminate slum areas and provide decent, habitable housing for those most in need were set to progress further. The Cork Corporation and the City Manager were said by the publication to have had already set a fine example for other cities and towns in the Free State regarding housing schemes and slum clearance. Over the past few years, it was claimed that a tremendous effort had been underway to tackle the slum problem. In various districts across Cork city, housing schemes had been implemented, providing much-needed employment, fine dwellings at reasonable rents, and opportunities for workers to become homeowners through the Small Dwelling Acquisition Acts.

What had been regarded as the progressive City Manager, and the enlightened leadership of the Cork Corporation, were, in the article's view, to be commended for their outstanding contributions to social services in the city. Furthermore, it claimed that it was heartening to learn that even more benefits were to be extended to the citizens. It was proposed that £230,000 would be allocated for the construction of additional working-class dwellings in the near future,

⁸⁶ *Cork Examiner* 31/5/1935

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signalling the end of the era of slum dwellings in Cork city.⁸⁷

At a September 1935 meeting of the city council, it had been highlighted that the Department sanctioned the purchase of ten acres of land adjacent to Baker's Lane for the purpose of a housing scheme, at a price of £175 per acre, free of all charges. A similar sanction was obtained for the purchase of 2.5 acres of land, including the house, out-offices, and yard, at Gurranabraher, from Mrs. Mary Teresa Glynn, at £100 per acre.⁸⁸

By November 1935, the laying of sewers for municipal and utility housing schemes in Cork city became the subject of a disagreement regarding the division of labour between two trades union organisations involved in building, reconstruction, and similar works. The organisations in question were the United Operative Plumbers and Domestic Engineers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, which had a branch office in Cork, and the Cork Operative Society of Masons, Bricklayers, Tilers, and Paviors. For some time, the issue of which organisation should have the right to undertake certain types of work had led to differing opinions. These differences, it seemed, had not been fully resolved, and it was reported that there was a possibility of delays in commencing new works until the matter was settled.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ *Cork Examiner* 28/8/1935

⁸⁸ *Cork Examiner* 11/9/1935

⁸⁹ *Cork Examiner* 25/11/1935

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This dispute was discussed at the subsequent full meeting of the city council, as it had a very negative impact on building progress in the city. The following report was read from the City Manager, Mr. P. Monahan:

"I am informed by the South of Ireland Builders' Association that a dispute exists between the United Operative Plumbers' and Domestic Engineers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland and the Cork Operative Society of Masons, Bricklayers, Tilers, and Paviors. The dispute is confined to work financed by the Corporation and concerns the division of labour between the members of the two societies. The matter in dispute was subject to arbitration in June of this year, but the United Operative Plumbers' and Domestic Engineers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland does not accept the arbitrator's decision. In these circumstances, it is regretted that no further building contracts can be entered into pending a settlement of the dispute."

Alderman Allen stated that he did not wish to interfere with any trade union dispute, but he pointed out to the City Manager that this dispute could last for months or even years. He suggested that the City Manager should be directed to proceed with the contracts and allow the contractor to settle the matter between the masons and plumbers. Mr. Horgan remarked that sewers could be made of cast iron as well as ware, and if they were made of cast iron, masons could not lay them. Alderman Allen moved that the latter part of the report, which mentioned that no further contracts would be entered into, be deleted. Mr. D. G. Buckley seconded.

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Mr. C. Connolly expressed regret that no attempt had been made in the two months since the dispute began to resolve it. He found it deplorable that housing schemes might be delayed because of this dispute. He suggested that the Corporation should propose a solution, such as further arbitration or another method, to overcome the issue. Alderman Daly said it was indeed a very sad situation to read the contents of the report. After considerable difficulty and effort, he noted that the Council had financed schemes to provide houses for the city's poor. He also declared that the people had invested their money in these schemes, and that there should be an appeal made to the workers of Cork city to carry out their tasks in a brotherly manner, for the benefit of both the citizens for whom the houses were being built and those who had invested in the schemes.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ *Evening Echo* 27/11/1935

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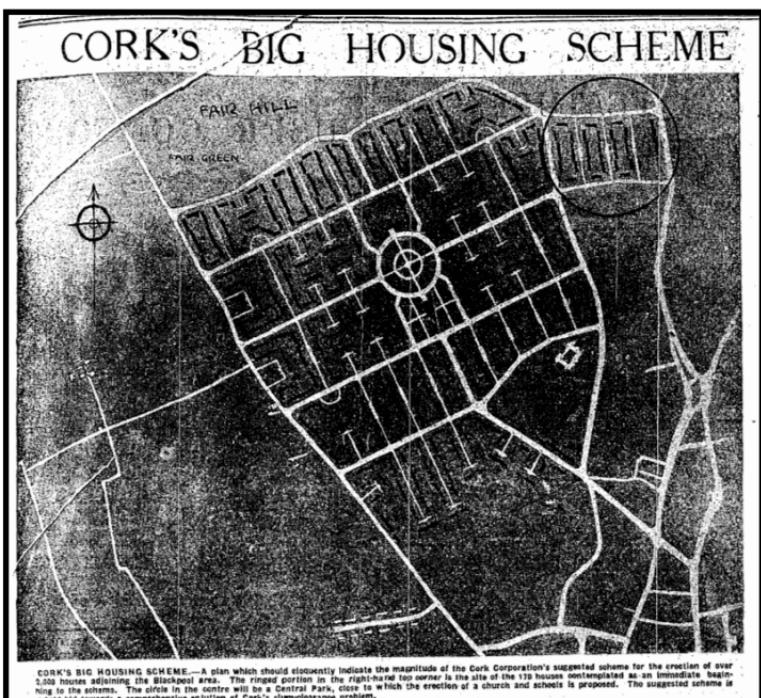
CORK HOUSING SCHEME

CORK HOUSING SCHEME.—Excavations being carried out for the new Housing Scheme in the North West Ward. ("Examiner" Photo).

A new housing scheme in the City North-West Ward
gets underway.

(Source: 'Cork Examiner' 16/12/1932)

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Plans of a suggested scheme for the construction of 2,000 houses by the city council in the Blackpool area of Cork City.

(Source: 'Cork Examiner' 6/9/1934)

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CORK HOUSING SCHEME | SCHOOL A



CORK HOUSING SCHEME.— Work in progress at Bandon Road, where 96 houses are in course of erection under the Cork Corporation scheme. ("Examiner" Photo)

Cork Corporation's housing scheme at Bandon Road, Cork City, as a work in progress.
(Source: 'Cork Examiner' 19/1/1935)

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HOUSES FOR THE PEOPLE,

1936-1939

In January 1936, at a meeting of the General Purposes Committee of Cork Corporation, with Alderman Allen presiding, the Chairman enquired of the City Manager why the contractor, Mr. Barrett, had not progressed with the construction of houses at Spangle Hill. The City Manager responded that he believed the delay was due to a dispute between certain trade unions regarding the laying of drains. The Chairman commented that it was a regrettable state of affairs if such a dispute still persisted, especially considering that hundreds of skilled tradesmen were unemployed in the city while, at the same time, hundreds of families were anxiously awaiting the opportunity to move into the new houses.⁹¹

At a January 1936 meeting of the city council, proposing that the sympathy of the Council be tendered to Rev. K. O'Sullivan, Mr W. J. O'Sullivan, I.L.O., and other members of the family of the late Mr J. F. O'Sullivan, Mr Morgan spoke of the deceased's long and energetic connection with the Corporation during his 23 years of membership of that body. He highlighted Mr O'Sullivan's deep interest in housing, which was evident in the pressure he exerted to ensure the north-west ward housing scheme was initiated promptly. Mr O'Flynn seconded the motion, noting that the late Mr O'Sullivan possessed a civic pride of which any Corkman might be proud.⁹²

⁹¹ *Cork Examiner* 18/1/1936

⁹² *Cork Examiner* 29/1/1936

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The '*Evening Echo*' reported in February 1936 that the Cork Corporation, within the following few months, was set to embark on yet another housing scheme in the city. This new development was to be located on a recently acquired site at Greenmount, extending down to Friar's Walk. As for the other housing schemes already underway, it noted that considerable progress had been recorded since the beginning of the year. At Spangle Hill, for example, where 178 houses were under construction, the project was nearing completion. It was expected that all the dwellings would be fully finished by the end of March or the beginning of April. At that point, approximately 90 of the houses were already occupied by families who had been relocated from slum areas. Notably, this was to be the first scheme completed by the Corporation in which all houses included bathrooms. A portion of these homes was to be let to general applicants, while the majority would be reserved for those displaced by slum clearance efforts. Additionally, a further contract had been issued for the construction of 106 more houses in the same locality. However, progress on that contract was stalled due to a trade dispute beyond the Corporation's control.

Progress at Gurranabraher had also been satisfactory. The most recent scheme there had included 82 houses, which were nearing completion. Around 30 families, already relocated from slum areas, had taken up residence. The vacated houses had since been demolished under Corporation clearance orders. A new scheme for 200 houses had also been approved by the Minister for Local Government and Public Health. It was ready to go out for tender, pending the resolution of the aforementioned trade dispute. Meanwhile, the Bandon Road Housing Scheme, consisting of 86

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houses, was also approaching completion. Some of these homes were already occupied. Of the 20 tenants accommodated there, all had come from unsanitary or slum-type housing, which had subsequently been demolished by the Corporation. The Greenmount project, the Corporation's latest undertaking in its ongoing slum clearance programme, was to include approximately 215 houses. Construction was expected to commence early in March of that year.

The Corporation's policy in allocating housing under these various schemes was to distribute 60 per cent of homes to those displaced by slum clearance, 20 per cent to individuals living in independently unfit or unsanitary conditions, and another 20 per cent to other applicants. However, the Corporation was reportedly facing difficulties in implementing its slum clearance programme due to certain provisions within the Unemployment Assistance Act. Under this legislation, recipients of unemployment assistance residing within the borough found themselves subject to reductions in support when transferred to Corporation housing outside the borough boundary. Despite repeated representations to the Government seeking remedial action, no measures had yet been taken. This situation had allegedly caused significant inconvenience for some individuals who were relocated from the inner-city slum dwellings.⁹³

Also in February 1936, at the Lecture Theatre of the Dairy Science Institute, University College Cork, Mr Aodh de Blacam delivered a lecture titled "Do the Workers Want Property?". The event was chaired by

⁹³ *Evening Echo* 1/2/1936

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Professor A. O'Rahilly, M.A., Registrar of University College Cork, and also present on the platform were the Very Rev. Dr Paschal, O.M. Cap., M.A., and Professor J. Busteed, M.Comm. In opening his lecture, Mr de Blacam discussed the possibility of another war in Europe. He warned that powers currently considered inferior might band together and achieve dominance in a way previously thought unlikely. While this might seem extraordinary, he argued that experts would likely support the plausibility of such an outcome. Referring to a proposed bill in England advocating for the legalisation of euthanasia for those suffering from incurable diseases, he condemned what he saw as a resurgence of paganism in modern Europe. He further expressed concern about the rise of heathen powers, particularly Soviet Russia and Japan—countries with large territories where, he said, children had never heard the name of Christ, nor been taught the values of love and charity.

Mr de Blacam also criticised a recent statement from his friend, ex-Labour leader Mr Tom Johnson, who had suggested there was no need for a “back-to-the-land” movement, claiming there were already enough people on the land. Mr de Blacam disagreed strongly, arguing that such views undermined sound social doctrine, as celebrated in Oliver Goldsmith’s *‘The Deserted Village.’* He pointed to the growing influence of the socialist movement, citing recent events in Dublin City, where workers objected to purchasing Corporation-built houses, preferring to rent instead. He believed this attitude undermined the concept of independence and home ownership, which should have been embraced as a first step towards self-sufficiency. Turning to housing policy, Mr de Blacam proposed that, in future schemes,

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no more than eight to ten houses should be built per acre. He criticised denser developments of up to seventeen houses per acre as being little better than urban tenements. He questioned whether any party or group in Ireland was capable of implementing the kind of society he envisioned, being a society that would restore traditional Irish values. While many patriots might offer theoretical support, he felt principles were often kept in “cold storage” rather than actively pursued. Once constitutional issues were settled to general satisfaction, he believed there would be little difference between those shaped by the Nationalist and Catholic traditions. He urged a policy of self-sufficiency as a way to reduce dependence on international finance and avoid war. Additionally, he called for restrictions on female employment in industry, suggesting a 20% limit to prevent the inversion of traditional family roles, where women were becoming the primary wage earners. He also advocated for more personal and localised governance.

Following the lecture, Rev. E. J. Dalton, C.C., of SS. Peter and Paul’s Church, proposed a vote of thanks. He acknowledged the complexity of labour issues in the modern machine age, noting the troubling reality of mass unemployment caused by overproduction. While some employers had suggested profit-sharing as a solution, Dalton argued this did not amount to real ownership. Co-operative ownership had also been proposed but, in his view, had failed to match the effectiveness of existing company-based systems. In the industrial model of the 1930s, he added, the human element was often seen as the most replaceable, and thus the least valued component.

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Labour's Mr J. Hurley, N.T., T.C., Chairman of the Cork Workers Council, supported the vote of thanks but raised a pointed question: who, exactly, was going to give the workers property? While he personally had strongly supported the "back-to-the-land" idea, he acknowledged that for the average labourer, such a goal was practically unattainable. He argued that more concrete answers were needed if such visions were to be realistically achieved.⁹⁴

A meeting of a group of North-West Ward property owners was held in the Bandon Hill Schools in February 1936, with a good attendance of members. Several matters concerning the hardened efforts of the association, whose objective had been to safeguard the interests of property owners whose buildings had been demolished by the Cork Corporation under a slum clearance scheme, were discussed. General satisfaction was expressed with the steps that had been taken to secure compensation for the affected owners. A vote of thanks was passed to the members of the Corporation for their co-operation in supporting the grievances of the association.⁹⁵

The '*Evening Echo*' opined in June 1936 that there was a consistent and growing demand for modern, adequately equipped housing at a reasonable cost, which remained one of the defining aspects of development in the Irish Free State. Successive governments, including the one in office at that time, had shown considerable interest in addressing housing needs, contributing to a notable increase in residential construction across the country.

⁹⁴ *Cork Examiner* 4/2/1936

⁹⁵ *Evening Echo* 6/2/1936

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Local authorities, the article noted, had played a significant role in this process, particularly in the provision of housing for low-income families. Although modest in size, these homes marked a substantial improvement over the older dwellings found in slum areas. Typically, they included living rooms, bedrooms, kitchens, and bathrooms with modern sanitation facilities. For many, these homes addressed long-standing deficiencies in housing conditions. While progress had been made, efforts to achieve comprehensive accommodation for all in need were ongoing. In addition to local authority initiatives, public utility societies served individuals in a stronger financial position who sought a higher standard of housing. These organisations contributed to the expansion of modern housing options by building homes with improved designs and layouts. One such example was St. Anthony's Public Utility Society, based at 54 Grand Parade, Cork. The society had nearly completed its first housing project—Bernadette Way—located between Boreenmanna and Ballinlough Roads, a well-situated area with access to city amenities. Twelve of the planned sixteen houses in this scheme had already been completed. The architectural design and oversight of the scheme were handled by Messrs. Ryan and Fitzgibbon of 21 South Mall, Cork city, who had prior experience with both city and county projects. The houses featured terrazzo flooring in halls and kitchens, steel sash windows fitted into hardwood frames, and included amenities such as either a range or boiler in the kitchen with copper piping. A low-level WC was provided, and each house had front and rear gardens. Additional features included paneled staircases, flush doors throughout—reflecting contemporary hygienic

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standards—and spacious interiors. A built-in coal store was integrated into each unit. The lounge hall was particularly well-lit and included a cloak closet. The properties were constructed by Crowley Bros., using reinforced concrete for foundations and walls. Although the location offered privacy, it remained highly accessible, being only a two-minute walk from a city bus route with low fare, and within walking distance of the local church. Each home comprised three bedrooms, a bathroom, a drawing room, a dining room, a kitchen, a larder, and a lounge hall. Notable design elements included a serving hatch, a hall cloak closet, a specially designed hot press, and flush-panel doors throughout the interior.⁹⁶

At an August 1936 meeting of Cork Corporation, the Town Clerk read a letter from the Minister for Local Government and Public Health. The letter announced that a 50% contribution would be made from the Employment Fund towards the cost of developing housing sites, to be undertaken within the current financial year. The local authority would be responsible for covering the remaining 50%. The letter noted that, as per the annual return for the year ending 31 March, the Corporation held approximately 169 acres of land earmarked for housing under the Housing of the Working Classes Acts. The Minister encouraged the Corporation to submit proposals for site development immediately. These should include a layout plan with details of roads, sewers, and water mains, as well as cost estimates. However, the letter clarified that this development cost would not be subsidised under the Housing (Finance and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act,

⁹⁶ *Evening Echo* 5/6/1936

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1932. In response, Mr Horgan asked if the Corporation was required to contribute half of the funding. The City Manager confirmed this, stating the amount would be £9,800 each. The Chairman remarked that, since the Corporation had already struck their rates, the funding would need to be raised through a loan.

The City Manager noted that two proposals had been put forward and recommended forming a small committee to evaluate them. Mr Hurley agreed and suggested that the committee also advise on the most effective way to allocate the funds. Mr O'Leary seconded the proposal, and Mr Horgan added that the City Manager could prepare a report in the meantime. The Chairman supported the formation of a committee, stressing the importance of carefully reviewing the matter. It was unanimously agreed to appoint a committee of five:

- Mr S. O'Leary
- Mr J. Hickey
- Mr J. Horgan
- Mr. Buckley
- The Chairman, Alderman F. Daly

Later in the meeting, Mr. T. Quill raised a query about the issuance of certificates under the Housing Acts, 1932. He asked whether any investigation was made into the wages paid during the construction of the certified houses. The City Manager (Mr. Monahan) responded that the Corporation had no responsibility for wage oversight. Their only function in this context, he said, was to certify that the houses complied with statutory requirements concerning size and structure. He also clarified that such grants were issued by the

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Local Government Department, and not by the city Corporation. Mr. T. Quill reiterated that the Corporation's sole role was to certify the physical compliance of the houses. Mr. Buckley then made a pointed comment about Labour members "practising what they preach", prompting a brief, heated exchange with Mr Hickey and Mr J. M. Buckley. Mr. Quill responded that such remarks were expected and typical. The discussion was subsequently closed.⁹⁷

In September 1936, at an inquiry held at the City Hall, Cork, by Mr W. Ian Bloomer, B.E., B.Sc., Local Government Inspector, it was revealed that the Presentation Brothers had agreed to sell 11 acres of land at Greenmount to the Cork Corporation, land which they themselves needed, in order to facilitate the Corporation's housing scheme in that area. This specific inquiry was conducted under Part II of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1931, and Section 37 of the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1931. It related to Cork Borough Housing Schemes Nos. 1 and 2, and to a request for the Minister for Local Government to confirm a compulsory purchase order under both schemes.

Housing Scheme No. 1 included properties at:

- 124 Shandon Street (a shop and tenement),
- 78 Wolfe Tone Street,
- Moroney's Well Lane,
- Croft's Lane.

Scheme No. 2 involved:

⁹⁷ *Cork Examiner* 13/8/1936

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- A cottage and market garden at Goulding's Square,
- Property at Tower Street (formerly Cat Lane),
- An orchard or market garden at Friar's Walk, occupied by Mr Thomas Hosford.

Mr. Barry St J. Galvin, City Solicitor, explained that under the No. 2 (Greenmount) Order, the Corporation sought to acquire property previously identified as an unhealthy area, which had been excluded from a prior order by Judge Johnson. The Corporation was now seeking to acquire the land at market value, subject to later arbitration. The land in Greenmount and other areas included in Scheme No. 1 was deemed essential for the execution of the Corporation's housing plans. Mr Boyd-Barrett, B.E., the Corporation's architect who prepared the plans, stated that the acquisition of 124 Shandon Street was necessary to construct a proper access road to the new housing scheme. Shandon Street, he explained, was a busy thoroughfare, and a future bus service would likely pass through the area. Without acquiring the house, there would be no practical way to create a suitable roadway. Under cross-examination by Mr O'Keeffe, Mr Boyd-Barrett asserted that a 40-foot-wide road was the minimum required by modern town planning standards, with Dublin aiming for road widths between 40 and 60 feet. He disagreed with the suggestion that the road could be straight without taking the house; in fact, acquiring the property would allow for a smoother, rounded corner. He also mentioned that the city Corporation planned for approximately 3,000 houses in the area, which would necessitate wide, well-planned roads. In response to Mr Galvin, the architect confirmed that the acquisition of the house was essential for the success of the scheme.

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Mr O'Keeffe later raised the possibility of rebuilding the shop at 124 Shandon Street in line with the new plan, and of leasing it to Miss Bresnan, the current occupant. This matter was subsequently left for further consideration.

The City Manager, Mr P. Monahan, provided an overview of the Corporation's housing efforts. He stated that around 1,000 houses were needed to rehouse people currently living in slum conditions, and that roughly 1,200 houses had already been built. The vast majority had been constructed on the north side of the city, with only about 80 on the south side. However, the need on the south side remained great, and approximately 1,000 new houses were required there to replace dwellings deemed unfit for human habitation. Unfortunately, as it was pointed out, land on the south side was in short supply. Mr Monahan expressed gratitude to the Presentation Brothers for selling the 11 acres needed for the Greenmount scheme, despite the fact that they had need of the land themselves. He added with some regret that this level of co-operation had not been extended by other landowners in the area. The inquiry was ongoing at the time of reporting.⁹⁸

In October 1936, on the general question of housing activities in Cork city in recent years, the City Manager gave a '*Cork Examiner*' journalist some interesting details. Since the establishment of the Free State, a total of 1,000 houses had been erected in Cork city, Mr Monahan had asserted. Of these, 1,378 were built by the Corporation, and around 240 had been erected by individuals and public utility societies, with the

⁹⁸ *Evening Echo* 10/9/1936

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assistance of loans and grants from the Corporation. These houses were located in Wycherley, French's Villas, MacCurtain Villas, Capwell, Turner's Cross, and Ashburton.

When the City Manager arrived in Cork city in November 1924, the housing schemes in these areas, except for Capwell, Turner's Cross, Gurranabraher, and Spangle Hill, were nearing completion. The newer schemes had been in operation since the re-election of the Corporation in 1929. Around 1931, an estimate was made of the number of houses required in the city to replace those condemned as unfit for human habitation and to relieve existing overcrowding. It was found that 4,000 houses would be necessary to meet this need. So far, about 1,000 of the estimated 4,000 had been built, leaving approximately 3,000 still to be completed.

Looking ahead, Mr Monahan said that the bulk of these remaining houses were expected to be built between Halter's Lane and Gurranabraher, and between the Fair Field and Farrenferris. These would all be on the north side of the city, as other directions offered practically no facility for extensive schemes within the city boundary. It was hoped that, within two years, the entire area between Blarney Street and Shandon Street would be cleared, and that the land thus acquired would provide accommodation for people who were by then living in substandard housing in the Grattan Street area.

As he had outlined in a previous article, the City Manager noted that the questions of finance and labour were amongst two highly significant factors in

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determining the pace of future progress. At that time, the system of financing these housing schemes involved borrowing from the public and receiving an annual Government grant, which covered two-thirds of the loan charges for all houses built for the purpose of slum clearance. This Government grant had been in effect since 1932 and was considered an undeniable benefit. To offer firsthand insight into the current conditions, the City Manager kindly accompanied the Examiner representative on a tour of inspection of both areas still awaiting clearance and those where the Corporation's housing schemes were either complete or underway. In the low-lying part of the city known as the Marsh, he pointed out a typical site in need of redevelopment. A small, tunnel-like entrance led to a cluster of houses completely enclosed by surrounding buildings. This was Fitzgerald Alley, where one particularly jarring feature was a line of lavatories standing immediately in front of the houses.

Moriarty's Lane, off Shandon Street and situated on a high elevation, revealed two terraces of small dwellings flanking a much-worn laneway just six feet wide. The area had displayed clear signs of congestion and overcrowding, where light and air struggled to penetrate. On the other side of Shandon Street, hidden from public view, was St Joseph's Court—a name that belied the poor conditions. Accessed via a short and extremely narrow passage beneath the Shandon Street houses, the court featured two communal lavatories at one end, serving some twenty houses. In stark contrast, it was claimed that a visit to the Gurranabraher housing site offered a striking example of the city's progress in slum clearance. Those familiar with the area's previous condition would be astonished by the transformation.

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Trimbath's Lane and its surrounding substandard dwellings had vanished. The entire area had been levelled, and in its place stood what could be described as the new township of Gurranabraher. By this period, the city Corporation had erected around 500 houses there, with construction still actively underway.⁹⁹

According to a short opinion piece in a November 1936 edition of the '*Cork Examiner*,' in comparing the housing efforts undertaken in both the cities of Dublin and Cork, a stark difference emerged when they looked at the "facts and figures." Between 1930 and 1933, the editorial noted that Dublin Corporation constructed 2,047 houses. This number increased with 910 houses built in 1934, 1,085 in 1935, and 1,522 in 1936. Altogether, Dublin Corporation had built 5,564 houses over a six-year period. In addition, plans had already been set in motion for the immediate construction of 2,211 more houses, and sites for a further 2,197 were being secured at that time. The area of Cork City, by comparison, was approximately one-quarter the size of Dublin City. To the writer, the question arose: had they, in proportion, constructed at least 1,391 houses over the same six-year period? What was, it asked, the actual figure? Specifically, did Cork city build 380 houses in 1936? It claimed that it was worth noting that other urban centres were also actively progressing in their housing programmes. For example, it was pointed out that Limerick had secured a loan of £45,000 for their Distillery Field housing scheme.¹⁰⁰

At a January 1937 meeting of the South Cork Board of

⁹⁹ *Cork Examiner* 20/10/1936

¹⁰⁰ *Cork Examiner* 16/11/1936

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Public Assistance, Mr. J. Morrissey, solicitor, appeared before the Board on behalf of Mr. Ellis of Ballyvolane, from whom the Board intended to acquire seven acres of land for a housing scheme. Mr. Morrissey explained that his client owned a 77-acre farm, of which 12 acres were swampy and unsuitable for cultivation between November and May, while another 28 acres were planted with root crops. If the Board proceeded with the proposed acquisition, it would compel Mr. Ellis to let go some of his labourers. Mr. Ellis operated a model dairy and had recently invested several hundred pounds in modern dairy machinery. Following a review of the site map and consultation with their engineer, the Board appointed a Sites Committee to inspect the land and provide a report.

A lengthy discussion followed regarding the degree of relationship between an applicant for a cottage and a former occupier, for whom the cottage was originally intended. Mr. Crowley proposed, and Mr. Corry seconded, that the cottage recently vacated by the late Jeremiah McCarthy of Dunderrow, Kinsale, be transferred to his nephew, William McCarthy. Mr. B. Cooney disputed the applicant's claim to be a nephew of the deceased. Several letters were read to clarify the family relationship. When asked for his father's name, the applicant stated he was only three years old when his father died, but believed his name was David. Mr. O'Sullivan proposed, and Mr. Ryan seconded, an amendment that possession of the cottage be regained and that it be advertised for letting in the usual manner. The amendment was carried.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ *Cork Examiner* 19/1/1937

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A few weeks later, it was reported that an estimated profit of £600 per year was generated by a business operating from premises that had been proposed for demolition under the North-West Ward Housing Scheme. This statement was made during an inquiry at Cork City Hall, conducted by Mr. J. McAuley. The purpose of the inquiry was to assess compensation related to the Corporation's County Borough of Cork Housing Order, 1935. The resolution declaring the specified area to be a clearance area had been passed at a Corporation meeting on 31 October 1933 and was later confirmed by the Minister for Local Government and Public Health on 8 March 1934. Mr. B. Galvin, solicitor, appeared on behalf of the Corporation, along with Mr. G. Byrne, B.E., Housing Superintendent, and Mr. Michael Murphy, auctioneer, who acted as valuer. The solicitors involved included Messrs. W. F. O'Connor, M. A. Harvey, R. E. Donegan, M. O'Connor, J. K. Coakley, and R. Kilbride (of Messrs. Babington, Clarke & Mooney), as well as J. B. Sullivan (of Messrs. McCarthy). Counsel present included Messrs. G. J. Daly, M. O'Driscoll, and D. J. Callanan.

In the compensation claim brought by Mr. John Murphy of West View, South Douglas Road—represented by Mr. O'Driscoll, instructed by Mr. W. F. O'Connor—it was stated by Mr. Michael Murphy, auctioneer, that the site value of the four houses, owned by the claimant and located on Beecham's Lane, was £35 19s. 6d., with clearance costs estimated at £12 10s. 6d. Mr. W. L. Kelleher, Civil Engineer appearing for the claimant, assessed the value of the sites at £60 3s. 6d. In another claim, brought by the representatives of the late William O'Shaughnessy, of 18 Corbett's Lane, John Hartnett stated he was acting on behalf of his

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mother-in-law, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. He testified that the dwelling at 18 Corbett's Lane was a well-maintained house with three bedrooms situated upstairs, and that approximately £100 had been spent on its repair. Adjacent to the dwelling was a slaughterhouse, which had importantly provided Mrs. O'Shaughnessy with her livelihood. Mr. W. L. Kelleher, C.E., valued the entire premises at £600, with a site value of £54 18s., making a total of £654 18s. Mr. Michael Murphy, however, valued the premises at £525. Mr. O'Driscoll, instructed by Mr. W. F. O'Connor, appeared for the claimant.¹⁰²

At a February 1937 meeting of the Cork Corporation, presided over by the Lord Mayor, a statement was read by Mr. William Mulholland, who led a deputation from the National Leaseholders' Organisation on behalf of leaseholders of Corporation property. Speaking for the member leaseholders in Turner's Cross and Mayfield (Montenotte Park), the deputation appealed to the Corporation, as a representative body of fellow citizens, to sell the land on which they had built their homes. They expressed appreciation for the facilities already provided by the Corporation, but maintained that they could not truly own their homes unless they also owned the land beneath them. They argued that the original purpose of the housing schemes had shifted—from providing affordable homes for working ratepayers to generating additional revenue for the city Corporation.

Mr. Connolly then inquired about the number of leaseholders the deputation claimed to represent. The Lord Mayor responded that such a question was better

¹⁰² *Cork Examiner* 20/2/1937

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addressed outside a Corporation meeting. Mr. Connolly clarified that his concern was with the deputation's authority to speak for the leaseholders in question. Mr. Mulholland replied that they could provide a list of the leaseholders represented and asserted that they spoke on behalf of a large majority. He noted that those concerned were individuals paying approximately £5 annually in ground rents, most of whom had secured loans under the Small Dwellings Acquisition Act. The Corporation decided to refer the matter to the General Purposes Committee. Following a suggestion from Mr. Morgan, the City Manager and the Law Advisor were instructed to prepare reports for the Committee's consideration.¹⁰³

In late February 1937, a meeting took place involving the workers employed on the Corporation Housing Scheme at Spangle Hill. Held in St. Mary's Hall, the meeting concluded with the unanimous decision to continue a strike. Earlier that day, the workers held a protest march through the city. Leading the procession was a banner bearing the slogan, "Four days' work, four days' pay." Another meeting was scheduled for that evening at St. Mary's Hall, where further negotiations with the City Manager were expected to take place.¹⁰⁴

A special meeting of the Cork Corporation was held in March 1937 to consider the implications of the North-West Ward Property Owners' Association's protest regarding the current housing scheme and the existing demolition order. The Association requested that, where appropriate, the order be repealed in part.

¹⁰³ *Evening Echo* 24/2/1937

¹⁰⁴ *Cork Examiner* 26/2/1937

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Alderman Allen, seconding the resolution, referred to several matters arising from the recent arbitration proceedings, including:

- The basis of compensation,
- Actual assessments made,
- Cost of demolition
- Provision of alternative accommodation

He stated he was familiar with every house in the North-West Ward and emphasised that many of the properties in question were of sound construction and should not have been condemned. The Town Clerk stated that he had received correspondence from the Association, enclosing a copy of a statement made by Mr. W. F. O'Connor, solicitor, at the last meeting. The Association agreed with the need to eliminate slums, but argued that structurally sound houses should not be demolished without suitable compensation. They urged the Corporation to rectify the serious injustice caused by the Corporation's 1933 Demolition Order. Mr. Harrington noted that the Association had submitted several certificates from architects regarding certain properties included in the order. These documents asserted that the houses in question were not unfit for habitation and should not be classified as slums.

The Chairman asked whether it was true that houses had been demolished for which owners had claimed compensation, and which were allegedly fit for human habitation. The City Manager responded that he had not received any formal claims in writing. While statements had been read out, only one house had been specifically mentioned, and no particular property was under current discussion. He explained that the

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Corporation had acted based on an order that had been the subject of a public inquiry, where some objections were upheld, and others were dismissed. Subsequent to the inquiry, amendments had been made to the order following an appeal to the High Court. The Chairman remarked that it appeared people had been misled into believing that one test case would govern all others. He added that under the original clearance order, mistakes had certainly been made — good houses had been demolished, which he considered a scandal. If the Corporation had acted wrongly, even unintentionally, it had a moral duty to take all appropriate steps to remedy widespread injustice. Mr. McCarthy-Morrogh proposed a resolution stating that the Corporation should take no further steps to demolish any remaining houses until officials, including the City Engineer, submitted a report on the current market value of those properties. Furthermore, no demolition should proceed until a similar report was made by the Department's Inspector. Supporting this resolution, he expressed no sympathy for owners of actual slum properties. This was because, the city Corporation, he claimed, was right to eliminate those. However, he stressed that it was wrong to destroy decent homes, some of which had seen significant investment in recent years, without offering any compensation.

Addressing the inquiry, he said it gave the impression of being pre-determined. While he did not suggest the Inspector came to Cork city with a fixed view, he rejected the idea that the entire issue was decided in an office in Merrion Square. The process, he felt, had wasted the time of legal representatives, property agents, and members of the public. Contrary to belief,

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the original government order did provide for compensation, and houses like those at issue should have been included in the relevant part of the order that allowed it. Alderman Anthony asked whether the Corporation was required to demolish habitable houses, as this had clearly caused significant hardship. The Chairman responded that Mr. Justice Johnson had ruled that local authorities must exclude from clearance orders any houses that were not dangerous to public health. He added that Corporation officials should provide a report on how many structurally sound houses were included in the order.

Mr. B. Galvin, City Solicitor, explained that under Section II of the Act, a house deemed "unhealthy" must be condemned. However, a structurally sound house located on a narrow street with poor front and rear ventilation could still be classified as unhealthy. The legislation was nearly identical to its English counterpart, and since then, the British Parliament had amended their law to allow compensation in such cases. Ireland's legislation, however, contained no such provision. Mr. Galvin clarified that the Corporation had no legal power to offer compensation under the current Act. This Act, he said, had been introduced by one government and adopted by another, so it was not a matter of party politics. He also denied claims that city Corporation officials were unfairly blamed, as disagreements were inevitable when attempting to acquire property. He also corrected another great misunderstanding: that anyone appearing before Judge Johnson could automatically have their property moved to the compensatable portion of the order. This was not the case. Several property owners who appealed had not succeeded in doing so. The law still stood that a

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house in a narrow street could be deemed unfit, regardless of its structural condition.

Alderman F. J. Daly admitted that the city Corporation had acted too hastily at the outset. They had believed they were doing the right thing and assumed that fair compensation would be paid. The City Manager, offering a general statement, outlined that the key issue was whether a house was truly unfit for habitation. The law required consideration of:

- Sanitary defects,
- Street arrangement and width,
- General compliance with building bye-laws.

He explained that under the Public Health Act, a house deemed unfit would not qualify for compensation. Recent discussions had made it clear that the Corporation was reluctant to proceed further along these lines, particularly in areas like the North-West. From a planning perspective, the City Manager questioned whether any justification existed for significant investment in properties in those areas over the past ten years. Any such investment, he noted, had been made in violation of Corporation bye-laws and at the owners' own risk — and some of the cases raised at the meeting fell into this category. He concluded by stating that the Corporation was not securing any particular advantage under the Slum Clearance Order — the cost of acquiring land would ultimately amount to £1,500–£2,000 per acre after all expenses were considered.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ *Cork Examiner* 3/3/1937

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At an April 1937 meeting of the city Corporation, the following motion, proposed by Alderman Allen, was passed: that the City Manager be requested, when preparing plans for future housing schemes;

- to ensure that 50 per cent of the houses be constructed using brick, and
- that 50 houses be reserved, outside of contract, to be built by direct labour as an experiment.

Alderman Mr. Allen stated that there had been numerous complaints made regarding dampness in Corporation houses. He added that the proposed experiment would not be very costly.¹⁰⁶

Led by a pipe band, a group of men marched to Cork City Hall in June 1937 to send a deputation to the meeting of Cork Corporation. At the Council meeting, presided over by the Lord Mayor, Alderman S. French, the Town Clerk read a communication from a group representing the unemployed, particularly those involved in the Spangle Hill housing scheme, requesting that a deputation also be received. Mr. Furlong, acknowledging that the grant funds could only be obtained under the conditions set forth by the Minister, proposed the suspension of standing orders so the Corporation could accept the £20,000 grant on the Minister's terms. Alderman Allen objected, stating he had already submitted a notice of motion on the matter, and that it should be addressed accordingly. He suggested it was inappropriate to force the issue prematurely and noted that some members who had

¹⁰⁶ *Evening Echo* 28/4/1937

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initially opposed the grant now seemed to regret that decision.

A letter was then read from the Secretary of the Department of Local Government and Public Health, stating that as the Corporation had declined to accept the terms attached to the £20,000 grant from the Unemployment Schemes Vote, the offer had now been officially withdrawn. A motion to suspend standing orders was proposed by Mr. D. G. Buckley and seconded by Alderman Allen to discuss the issue. However, the motion was defeated in a vote. Upon hearing the result, Alderman Allen protested loudly, exclaiming, "It is an outrage to turn down £40,000!" There were cries of "No" in response, and the Lord Mayor rang the bell and moved to the next item of business. Mr. Quill commented, "It is an outrage by the people who did turn it down." Mr. Hickey agreed, stating it was an outrage committed solely by those who had voted against accepting the grant.

Later in the meeting, Mr. D. G. Buckley informed the Lord Mayor that the deputation from the unemployed workers was waiting outside. The Lord Mayor replied, "It is finished now." Mr. Buckley responded, "I don't see why a deputation of the unemployed should be refused to be heard." The Lord Mayor clarified that they were not being refused but had arrived late. When Mr. Buckley continued speaking, the Lord Mayor instructed him to sit down. Mr. Buckley protested, but the Lord Mayor ignored him, and proceeded with the agenda.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ *Cork Examiner* 24/6/1937

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In June 1937 Messrs. Hugo Flinn and T. P. Dowdall, Fianna Fáil general election candidates, addressed public meetings at Phair's Cross (Bandon Road) and at Blackrock. Mr. Flinn went on to say that whatever actions the Government took, they had to do so using the people's money. "What have we done with the people's money?" he asked rhetorically. In response, he pointed to the new housing schemes and the factory in Blackpool as tangible outcomes of that expenditure.¹⁰⁸

At a city council meeting in August 1937, a letter from the Unemployed Workers' Rights Association (Cork Branch) had been received, requesting that future city Corporation housing schemes be carried out using direct labour. Mr. Horgan asked how many such unemployed workers' associations existed. The Lord Mayor (Mr. Sean French) then suggested that the matter be referred back to the Standing Committee for consideration, and that they would await its report. Subsequently, the Lord Mayor's proposal was agreed upon.¹⁰⁹

In October 1937, the '*Cork Examiner*' reported that the development of a new municipal housing scheme in Cork city, located at Greenmount, was signalled by formal orders issued by Cork Corporation, authorising the purchase of land for the construction of housing. The proposed scheme, comprising 270 houses, was to span thirteen acres of development land bordered by Green Street, Barrack Street, Tower Street, and Friar's Walk. At the time, the land was occupied by the Presentation Brothers Order, who had co-operated with

¹⁰⁸ *Cork Examiner* 29/6/1937

¹⁰⁹ *Cork Examiner* 11/8/1937

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the Corporation to facilitate the land's acquisition. The paper stated that the city Corporation's order was issued primarily to resolve matters related to title and vested interests. The land was then used mainly as pasture and was considered virtually new soil, although certain portions contained farm buildings and old cottages.¹¹⁰

At a November 1937 meeting of the Cork Corporation, presided over by the Lord Mayor, Mr. J. Hickey, a report from the City Manager was presented for discussion. The report outlined concerns regarding the continuation of house-building for the working classes due to high construction costs. Tenders received on 28 October for the construction of 206 houses at Spangle Hill had estimated the total cost, including land acquisition, site development, architects' fees, clerk of works, and other incidental expenses at £109,000, equating to approximately £530 per house.

The City Manager noted that the Department of Local Government and Public Health would not subsidise the full loan charges for this cost. For families relocated from clearance areas, the Central Government would only subsidise up to £400 per house; for all others, up to £450. As a result, the State would cover only half of the loan charges, rather than the two-thirds originally intended for houses associated with slum clearance efforts. Rents for the new houses would thus be approximately 12s. 4d. per week, or an average of 9s. 7d., depending on occupancy. However, the Manager observed that these rents exceeded the means of many working-class families and suggested that proceeding

¹¹⁰ *Cork Examiner* 28/10/1937

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with the scheme without further government support would be unwise. He also argued that continuing to build under these conditions could perpetuate or even increase inflated construction costs. Mr. McCarthy-Morrogh, B.L., expressed grave concern over a recent government decision to raise housing grants, which excluded County Boroughs such as Limerick and Waterford. He urged the Corporation to call on the Government to extend these benefits to all areas. Mr. D. G. Buckley seconded this proposal.

The Lord Mayor responded, clarifying that Cork city had received subsidies of £400 and £450 for slum-clearance housing, though this did not apply to Limerick. He reported that, over the five years ending March 1937, the Corporation had spent £157,748 on loan charges, repairs, and related expenses, while collecting £159,411 in rents and subsidies—yielding a modest surplus of £1,663. Rates collected on the newly valued properties had risen from £2,982 in 1933 to £8,087 in 1937, totalling £25,231 over five years. A survey conducted in 1929 revealed that 4,068 houses were required in Cork to address unfit and overcrowded living conditions. Since 1931, the Corporation had built 772 houses, with an additional 372 under construction, demonstrating a shortfall in meeting housing needs. The Lord Mayor also addressed the misconception that re-housed slum residents were a burden on the rates, noting this was not supported by financial records.

The City Manager confirmed to Alderman Allen that the quoted cost per house represented the full, all-inclusive figure. Mr. Horgan highlighted that the required rent of 12s. 4d. per week would be unaffordable for families from slum clearance areas,

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many of whom earned no more than £1 per week. He echoed widespread calls for increased government support, cautioning that housing schemes might otherwise cease. While acknowledging the need for housing, he questioned the wisdom of initiating projects with such prohibitive rents. He advocated for the Government to continue subsidising loan charges at previous levels, regardless of increased house costs.

Mr. T Quill agreed with the need for greater subsidies due to escalating construction costs, but he opposed halting construction altogether. He questioned why tenants were expected to bear the cost of site preparation and road building. Responding to Mr. Horgan, the Lord Mayor clarified that his earlier financial figures referred to all Corporation-owned housing, noting the overall surplus and rising rates as evidence that housing schemes had not resulted in financial loss. Mr. Horgan argued that listeners might mistakenly believe the surplus applied solely to recently built houses, suggesting a figure of £2,000 in profit, which was not the case. Mr. T Quill strongly opposed any suspension of house-building, arguing that such a move would be unacceptable. He insisted that the city Corporation should continue construction at an accelerated pace, accompanied by a renewed call for increased government support. Mr. Horgan proposed deferring the report until the City Manager could provide specific figures on the cost and revenue of housing built over the past five years. However, Mr. Connolly opposed the deferral, asserting that housing provision was a core responsibility of the Corporation. He contended that even the-then proposed rent of 12s. 4d. was not unreasonable when compared with other housing schemes, and also urged that housing provision

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be approached as a national issue, with the Government assuming responsibility for funding.¹¹¹

At a meeting of the Cork Building Trade Workers Group held at Carpenters' Hall, five representatives were elected to the newly created Joint Industrial Council. The meeting also addressed the recent dismissal of building workers from the Corporation housing scheme at Gurranabraher. It was noted that the termination of 130 workers at this time would result in their losing their "Christmas holidays with pay." It was agreed that formal protests should be sent to both the city Corporation, and the Department of Local Government, urging that steps be taken to address and remedy the issue.¹¹²

At a meeting of the National Leaseholders' Association in Dublin, active member Mr. Mulholland referenced a recent statement made by the Cork City-based Mr. T. P. Dowdall, T.D., whom he described as a sincere supporter of the Leaseholders' movement. Mr. Dowdall had relayed that the Minister for Local Government, in discussions about housing sites, had defended the right of local authorities to raise rents. The Minister, he claimed, had argued that when a corporation increased rent, the proceeds went towards easing the burden of local rates, whereas a private landlord would retain the money for personal gain. In response, Mr. Mulholland stated that if this argument was meant to justify high ground rents on new housing schemes, such as those imposed by Cork Corporation, then the Leaseholders' organisation could not accept the Minister's reasoning.

¹¹¹ *Cork Examiner* 24/11/1937

¹¹² *Cork Examiner* 14/12/1937

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He went on to explain that the Cork Corporation Sub-Committee had informed a delegation from the organisation that the ground rents charged in Turner's Cross did not even cover the annual interest on the money the Corporation had borrowed to purchase and develop the land. As a result, the high rents imposed in that area did not contribute to rate relief, contrary to the Minister's suggestion.

He stated that, this situation, where leaseholders were burdened with annual ground rents that failed to meet loan interest payments, could only be addressed through an immediate purchase scheme. Such a scheme would allow the substantial costs of land acquisition to be repaid swiftly. Furthermore, Mr. Mulholland also criticised the Minister's stance if it was intended to justify a recent case in which Cork Corporation attempted to raise the ground rent on a business premises from £10 to £40, while also requiring the leaseholder to invest several hundred pounds in improvements. The organisation viewed such actions as deeply unfair, arguing that no leaseholder should be so heavily penalised for the supposed benefit of the wider rate-paying public.¹¹³

In February 1938, at meeting of the committee of the Cork Trades' Union (Workers') Council, Mr. Walsh stated that he had been directed by the Electrical Trade Union to draw attention to the significant volume of electrical work being carried out by individuals who were not properly qualified to do so. He emphasised that such work was being undertaken by persons who

¹¹³ *Cork Examiner* 24/12/1937

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were not members of the trade union. Mr. Walsh expressed the view that the Corporation officials responsible for the housing schemes should ensure that all electrical work is executed to a proper standard and under appropriate supervision. He noted that electrical work is highly skilled in nature, and if not carried out to the requisite standard, could pose serious danger to the occupants of the houses. He concluded by stressing that the matter required urgent attention.¹¹⁴

According to the '*Evening Echo*,' at the 1938 AGM of the Labour Party's Cork Central Constituency Council, at which members of various party branches and trade unions were present, Councillor Mr. Quill, reflecting on the performance of Labour's representatives within the Corporation, delivered a strong critique of the Council's approach to the development of housing schemes for working-class dwellings in the city. He expressed deep disappointment at the absence of any tangible or concrete proposals to indicate that progress on housing was being accelerated in any area of the city. Councillor Mr. Quill emphasised that the housing issue remained one of primary importance and urged that a special committee of the Corporation be established with the sole remit of addressing and advancing the housing question.¹¹⁵

In the 'Law and Finance' section of a March 1938 meeting of the city council, the Council considered the sanction of the appointments of Messrs. J. F. O'Connor, V. P. O'Leary, J. L. Donovan, and P. B. Curtis as rent collectors for the city's "working-class dwellings." These

¹¹⁴ *Evening Echo* 4/2/1938

¹¹⁵ *Evening Echo* 21/2/1938

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appointments were to be on a probationary basis for a period of six months, at an annual salary of £234 each. Alderman Mr. Allen expressed concern that many members of the public believed the positions in question had been vacant, when, in reality, the appointees had already been selected. Councillor Mr. D. G. Buckley strongly criticised the process, declaring that the method used had been grossly unfair to the unemployed of the city. Councillor Mr. McCarthy-Morrogh acknowledged that it was popular to champion the cause of unsuccessful candidates, but noted that, with only four positions available and 230 applicants, there were inevitably 226 disappointed contenders. He stated that, nevertheless, the City Manager should clarify the criteria upon which the appointments were made.

The City Manager responded by explaining that appointing rent collectors was a particularly difficult task. There were no formal qualifications for the role, and neither academic achievement nor mathematical ability necessarily indicated a person's capacity to collect rents effectively. Consequently, he had to rely substantially on personal judgment. The four candidates chosen were, in his opinion, the only ones with substantial prior experience in rent collection. While it was possible that other applicants could have succeeded in the role, he was unwilling to take the risk of appointing someone without the relevant experience. He conceded that he was not entirely satisfied with the current selection method and invited suggestions for a fairer process. He further noted that, as in England, there was no formal training scheme for rent collectors, and decisions had to be made based on available evidence and professional discretion.

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At this point, Mr. D. G. Buckley rose again and, in addressing the Lord Mayor (Councillor J. Hickey), referred to him as "Comrade" in a tongue-in-cheek manner. The Lord Mayor intervened and stated, "Please address the Chair in the proper manner." Mr. Hurley then remarked that there was a growing view that rent collectors ought to have some background in social work, suggesting that such a requirement merited consideration. When Mr. Buckley again attempted to speak, the Lord Mayor rang the bell and declared, "The matter is now closed." Mr. Buckley then retorted, "It is not closed."¹¹⁶

In the minutes of the Standing Committee, which were adopted at a March 1938 meeting of the city council, the following report was included: That the City Manager submitted a plan outlining the progress of the North City Development Scheme. It was noted that 226 houses were already under construction, a further 206 were shortly to be commenced at Spangle Hill, and plans had been completed for an additional 231 houses at Baker's Lane. The estimated total cost of these three schemes amounted to approximately £300,000. Of this sum, £120,000 was currently available, indicating that, should the Council approve the proposed schemes, it would be necessary to borrow the remaining funds at a later date.

The Lord Mayor observed that a considerable portion of the northern development area lay at a significant distance from the city centre. He expressed concern that workers might find locations in the Ballintemple

¹¹⁶ *Cork Examiner* 10/3/1938

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and Blackrock areas more convenient and better suited to their needs. Councillor Mr. Horgan, speaking on broader housing efforts, had urged that the scheme proposed for Greenmount be expedited. Following discussion, it was agreed to recommend to the Council that the proposed 231 houses at Baker's Lane be proceeded with.¹¹⁷

In May 1938, at a meeting of Cork Corporation, it was noted that the minutes of the Standing Committee included a report on the question of extending the city's administrative boundary. Councillor Mr. Furlong had proposed that the 1912 boundary line be adopted, subject to the following revisions: (a) that the line be taken south from Ballintemple and southwest along the "Ring" road to the end of Ballinlough Road; and (b) that the district of Wilton (Bishopstown), as far as Looney's Cross, together with such land as was required for the Housing Schemes at Spangle Hill and Gurranabraher, be included. However, as the proposal did not receive a seconder, it was not carried forward. Subsequently, the Lord Mayor proposed that the 1882 boundary line be adopted, with the addition of Douglas Village, Bishopstown as far as Looney's Cross, and sufficient land for housing purposes in the north-western area. Alderman Anthony seconded this proposal, which was duly adopted. Councillor Mr. Horgan then proposed that the City Solicitor be requested to furnish a written report to the General Purposes Committee on the legal aspects of recent rent increases imposed by the City Manager, outlining the Corporation's powers in the matter, and that the report be circulated among members. This proposal, seconded

¹¹⁷ *Cork Examiner* 24/3/1937

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by Alderman Mr. Daly (Carrigrohane), was also adopted.

A deputation representing the tenants was then received. During the discussion that followed, the City Manager indicated his willingness to withdraw the current rent increases, provided that the Committee would recommend to the Council the adoption of a principle whereby any future increases in rates would be applied to Corporation tenants. The Committee agreed to make this recommendation. Alderman Mr. Allen suggested that each member of the city council be provided with a copy of the relevant maps pertaining to the boundary extension. Councillor Mr. McCarthy-Morrogh BL supported the suggestion, stating that every member ought to be properly informed. It was decided to defer further consideration of the boundary extension until the maps had been distributed to all members. Regarding the rent increases on Corporation houses, Councillor Mr. Quill proposed that the matter be referred to the Housing Committee. Mr. McCarthy-Morrogh expressed support for the City Manager's offer, stating his belief that it was a fair compromise. The report, having incorporated these matters, was subsequently adopted.¹¹⁸

At a meeting of the Council of Cork Corporation held in June 1938, the Lord Mayor, Councillor J. Hickey, presided. The following report was submitted by the City Manager, Mr. P. Monahan:

"The consent of the Corporation is requested to borrow a sum not exceeding £300,000 for the erection of

¹¹⁸ Cork Examiner 25/5/1938

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houses and the payment of charges incidental to slum clearance and site development. Currently, the amount of capital available for housing is £134,150. There is £100,000 due to contractors on current schemes. For the construction of roads from St. Mary's Cathedral to Gurranabraher, and from St. Mary's Road to Farranree, £10,000 is required. Tenders are being invited for the construction of 240 houses, which may cost £120,000. It is not proposed to borrow immediately, but to position ourselves to take advantage of the first opportunity to borrow on favourable terms."

Mr. Connolly moved that the matter be referred to the Housing Committee for further review. Mr. Quill seconded the motion, adding that the Housing Committee should report back to the Corporation. Alderman Daly sought clarification from the City Manager, expressing understanding that the City Manager did not intend to borrow the full amount at once. He suggested that the City Manager provide an outline of how he planned to borrow the funds. The City Manager responded, emphasising the importance of the Corporation securing its place in the money market, as other authorities may be borrowing large sums. He explained that the Corporation should take steps to enter the market ahead of these other bodies and also reiterated the city Corporation's financial commitments, as detailed in his report. Mr. Horgan voiced concern, stating that they should secure the necessary finances before proceeding with any housing schemes.

The City Manager further explained that July, August, and September were typically "dead months" for such financial work, so it was proposed to float the loan at

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the most advantageous time, likely in September or October. Mr. D. G. Buckley underscored the urgency of proceeding with the housing scheme, arguing that securing the funds was the priority. The City Manager stated that the public should be informed that the Corporation was preparing to enter the market—not immediately, but within a reasonable time frame. This would allow for adequate planning and preparation for the loan issue. Mr. Quill jokingly remarked that the public would likely soon learn of the Corporation's intentions when they read the next morning's '*Examiner*.' Alderman Daly then proposed that the Council give consent to the City Manager to arrange the terms of the loan, with the understanding that the terms would be discussed with the Housing Committee before being reported back to the Council. The Lord Mayor remarked that, on a previous occasion when the Corporation sought a loan, applications had been made for twice the amount required.¹¹⁹

At a summer meeting of the Council of the Cork (Irish) Industrial Development Association, a letter was read from the Town Clerk of Cork City acknowledging receipt of a resolution passed by the Association, which urged the use of natural roofing slates in the Corporation's housing schemes. The Town Clerk stated that, following mature consideration of the relative costs and other relevant factors, the Council had decided it could not accede to the Association's request. For the information of the Association, the Town Clerk enclosed a copy of the minutes of the Standing

¹¹⁹ *Cork Examiner* 27/7/1938

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Committee on the subject, which had been duly adopted by the Council of the Cork IDA.¹²⁰

At the meeting of the Cork Corporation held in August 1938, the minutes of the Housing Committee, which were adopted, included the following report: The City Manager, Mr. P. Monahan, presented a statement detailing the total cost of constructing 266 houses at Baker's Lane. In discussing the City Manager's proposal for a comprehensive Town Planning survey of the city and its suburbs, the Council debated whether this survey should be conducted by the City Engineer or an outside specialist. Following a proposition from Alderman Allen, seconded by Councillor Connolly, it was agreed to recommend the undertaking of a general town planning survey for the city centre and its suburbs. Additionally, the Committee recommended that the clearance orders for Knapp's Square, St. Joseph's Court, and Fitzgerald's Alley, which were made in 1937, be renewed, as the original orders, they said, had not been properly signed (apparently the signatures were printed instead).

The City Manager presented the following breakdown of costs for the Baker's Lane housing development:

- Cost of land: £3,765
- Cost of development: £11,040
- Building contract: £110,408
- Architect's and surveyor's fees: £1,095
- Clerk of works: £504

The total cost for the project was £127,712.

¹²⁰ Cork Examiner 1/8/1938

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The rent for the new houses was calculated as follows:

- Interest on capital: £5,181
- Provision for sinking fund: £2,238
- Rates at £7 per house: £1,862
- Income tax: £420
- Rent collection, insurance, and repairs: £931

The total costs amounted to £10,640, with a government grant of £4,537. The annual cost after the grant was £6,083. The annual rent per house was £22 17s. 4d., with a weekly rent of 9s. 0d. (including rates) or 6s. 4d. (excluding rates).

The City Manager highlighted a key challenge: the financial burden on families living in slums who could not afford the weekly rent of 9s. It was estimated that there would be an annual loss of £800 on the letting of these houses. With 2,500 houses still needed for slum clearance, the annual loss could reach £8,000, assuming building costs had remained constant and employment levels did not drastically change. It was noted that costs for building houses varied significantly depending on the location. Building on level sites was cheaper than on hilly terrain, with the difference in costs for underworks and foundations estimated at £30 or £40 per house. The City Manager remarked that the land configuration around the city posed additional challenges for development, but such constraints could not be easily altered. Comparative figures for housing schemes completed since 1922 showed the following costs per house: MacCurtain's Buildings (£115), Krone's Villas (£110), MacSwiney's Villas (£81), Capwell (£60), Turner's Cross (£58), and Baker's Lane

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(£56). The City Manager expressed his belief that a general town planning survey should subsequently be undertaken. He specifically mentioned that the development of the southern side of the city presented challenges that could not be resolved without a comprehensive survey of the area.

The City Manager also submitted reports from the Medical Officer of Health identifying two unhealthy areas in the city. The first area was bounded by Corbett's Lane to the north, Second Burnt Lane to the east, Old Market Place and Lavitt's Lane to the south, and Kearney's Avenue to the west. The second area was bounded by Lavitt's Lane to the north, Old Market Place to the east, Coley's Lane and part of Old Market Place to the south, and Nicholas Well Lane and Cattle Market Street to the west. These areas were deemed unhealthy, and the City Manager stated that the conditions could only be effectively remedied by demolishing all the buildings in these locations, which were unfit for human habitation. After some discussion, the Council unanimously agreed to inspect these areas on the following Monday at 3 p.m. before taking any further action. In a final resolution, the Council authorised the sale of £11,606 worth of the Free State 5% Second National Loan to pay contractors for ongoing housing development.¹²¹

Also in August 1938, it was reported that, in a move reflecting its ongoing commitment to tackling the city's housing crisis, the Cork Corporation had approved the borrowing of £250,000 to fund the construction of new social housing. This funding was earmarked for the

¹²¹ *Cork Examiner* 24/8/1937

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provision of homes for individuals displaced from unhealthy living conditions, and for those who were eligible under the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890. The Corporation's immediate plan included the erection of 266 houses in the Baker's Lane area, at a projected cost of £127,712.

However, the Corporation acknowledged a significant difficulty associated with these urban renewal schemes, namely, the demolition of structurally sound or reasonably well-maintained houses located near the slum dwellings being cleared. These adjacent properties often fell within the designated clearance areas and, despite being in decent repair, faced compulsory demolition to accommodate broader redevelopment efforts. The article highlights the hardship experienced by owners of such properties, many of whom faced the loss of their investments with little or no compensation. Recognising the alleged unfairness of this outcome, the Corporation had resolved to inspect the affected districts in person. Their intention was to assess dwellings that were argued to be in a good state of repair and to ensure that, where demolition was unavoidable, that affected property owners received fair compensation. This approach had reflected a growing sensitivity within the Corporation to the social and economic consequences of slum clearance, and a willingness to balance public health objectives with private rights.¹²²

At a meeting of the city Corporation in September 1938, the Lord Mayor noted that some members were under the impression that, when discussing matters

¹²² *Cork Examiner* 25/8/1938

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pertaining to the North-West area, the presence of the Press might not be appropriate. Mr. O'Driscoll then suggested that item No. 2 on the agenda—the general question of housing—be discussed in public, and that consideration of individual cases under item No. 1 be deferred to a closed session. The Council accepted this suggestion. Opening the wider debate on the housing situation within the County Borough, the Lord Mayor remarked that there was a prevailing sense that insufficient progress was being made. It was for this reason that a special meeting had been convened to comprehensively address the issue. He stressed the severity of the housing shortage, citing numerous cases in which families with six or seven children were forced to reside in a single room, with no apparent redress in sight. He acknowledged the strain such cases placed on Corporation officers and members alike, noting that the situation was intolerable and required urgent action.

Councillor Mr. Buckley proposed that, wherever possible, housing construction should take place within the city borough. He pointed to a sizeable area between the Military Barracks and Blackpool that, in his view, held potential for development. He also highlighted the adverse impact of depopulation in inner-city areas like Watercourse Road, where small shopkeepers and ratepayers had suffered as residents relocated to areas such as Spangle Hill. Alderman Allen expressed support for Mr. Buckley's remarks and reiterated the need to extend the city boundary. He lamented that, as things stood, the city Corporation was then paying approximately £1,000 in rates to Cork County Council for houses built outside the city, and raised concerns about high rents that low-income earners could not afford.

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Councillor Mr. Connolly responded by stating that the Housing Committee had already examined the concerns raised. Councillor Mr. O'Driscoll then also suggested that the Corporation should employ an external expert to carry out a comprehensive housing survey. The Lord Mayor noted that the Council had already agreed to such a step. Mr. O'Driscoll questioned the usefulness of further discussion in the absence of the expert's report, a view echoed by Councillor Mr. MacSwiney, who felt that substantial progress could not be made until the report had been received. Councillor Mr. Quill, however, called for a time limit to be set on the proposed town planning scheme, arguing that housing development had so far been erratic and lacked strategic direction. He noted that up to 3,000 houses had been condemned and, at the current pace of construction, it would take years to replace them. Alderman Mr. Anthony then pointed out that the Corporation's ability to build was largely constrained by the availability of suitable land. He added that landowners often exploited housing announcements by inflating land prices, effectively holding the city to ransom. In some cases, he noted, the cost of site clearance rivalled that of the housing itself. While acknowledging that new housing schemes were already under way, he argued that progress need not wait for the town planning report.

The Town Clerk then read the minutes of the Housing Committee, which authorised the City Manager to raise a loan of £300,000 and recommended that a housing survey be undertaken. Mr. Buckley proposed that the Lord Mayor, City Manager, City Engineer, and a small delegation of Corporation members inspect the area

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between the Military Barracks and Blackpool to assess its viability for development and report back. Mr. Quill opposed focusing on a single area, arguing that the entire County Borough should be considered. Mr. O'Driscoll believed that, given their current resources at that time, the Corporation was already building as efficiently as possible. He urged that current schemes be completed before new ones were considered, and suggested that the town planning expert's report would guide future efforts.

The Lord Mayor confirmed that approximately 1,000 houses had been built since 1932. Mr. Quill then cited figures published in the Press indicating that, including those built by Utility Societies, the total number of houses constructed was 1,575. He noted that Limerick had reportedly outpaced Cork in housing development, relative to population. He moved that the Council be furnished with a report from the Medical Officer of Health detailing the number of condemned houses within the borough boundary. He further proposed a six-year scheme to build an equivalent number of new houses, with annual planning for appropriate sites and financial provision for the same. Alderman Allen seconded the motion.

Mr. O'Driscoll expressed reservations, suggesting that if the Corporation were serious about town planning, it should await the expert's report. The Lord Mayor queried whether the proposed housing scheme and the town planning initiative could proceed concurrently. Mr. Quill believed that they could. Mr. O'Driscoll reiterated his view that housing development should follow the expert's guidance. The Lord Mayor responded that the decision to commission a survey had

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been significantly influenced by the prospect of a boundary extension, and was not intended to delay or impede ongoing housing work. He added that the expert would advise on whether the boundary should extend to areas such as Tivoli, Blackrock, or Douglas, but in the meantime, and that schemes in places like Greenmount and Mayfield should proceed.

The City Manager reiterated that progress was ultimately a question of finance. Mr. O'Driscoll noted that although a £300,000 loan had been discussed, no clear progress had been made in securing it. He argued that without funding, further land acquisition was pointless. He speculated that the expert's report might touch on housing matters, and suggested that, if the boundary extension was the primary concern, the City Engineer's staff could compile a preliminary report on housing conditions and needs for the Corporation's consideration.¹²³

As per a September 1938 editorial in the '*Cork Examiner*,' Mr. Monahan, Cork's City Manager, spoke nothing but the plain truth when he told the Cork Corporation on Wednesday evening that the city could not simultaneously afford new City Halls, Schools of Commerce, and housing developments. The editorial, published in a local newspaper, reflects on this difficult balancing act, noting that the combined cost of the new City Hall and School of Commerce—£210,000—could instead have funded the construction of approximately 400 houses. However, the Corporation made a conscious decision to prioritise the Hall and

¹²³ *Cork Examiner* 22/9/1938

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School, thereby limiting its own borrowing capacity for other civic projects.

The editorial does not actually entirely condemn the expenditure, acknowledging that a city of Cork's apparent historical stature also required a suitable centre for municipal affairs. The previous building, situated in Fitzgerald Park, was considered inconvenient for public access. Though the-then new School of Commerce might have then seemed like a luxury, the editorial argues that in time it would prove its worth. Furthermore, thanks to the generous donation of the site by a public-spirited citizen, its cost was significantly reduced. Had a stark choice been necessary between constructing the City Hall or the School, the editorial contends that the School would have been the wiser selection. It reminds readers that, years previously, when Mr. Monahan served as City the Commissioner, he had prioritised housing over the construction of a new city Hall, using the compensation for the old Municipal Buildings (destroyed in 1920) to build urgently needed homes, being a move that received widespread public approval.

The editorial also points out that housing efforts in Cork city did not begin in 1932. Substantial progress had been made both before and since, though the demand for housing remains far from satisfied. While the Corporation's borrowing capacity had not been entirely exhausted, it was nonetheless constrained by factors outside of its control. In a tone of measured sympathy, the piece reflects that even the most cynical or stoic observer might understand the frustration of City Councillors urging the Manager to continue the strong housing programme. Advocacy for working-class

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and impoverished citizens, it claimed, was naturally popular, but such advocacy risked stalling in the face of larger geopolitical and financial tensions, especially those emanating from continental Europe.

The editorial critiques the fanciful financial schemes devised by theorists in recent years, which promise communal credit and unlimited uplift. These ideas, many imported from abroad, crumble quickly in the face of economic uncertainty or looming conflict. The Corporation may have authorised the City Manager to borrow £300,000 for housing, but authorisation is a far cry from successful loan procurement. The promise of 4% returns may appeal on paper, but lenders also want the assurance that their investment can be liquidated without significant loss. The writer concludes with a pragmatic suggestion: the Government should finance Cork city's housing programme, as it does elsewhere. The editorial suggests that funds from the Hospitals' Sweepstakes, of which only a portion has been spent on hospitals, and the remainder unaccounted for, could be effectively invested in housing. A £300,000 advance to Cork Corporation from Sweep proceeds could be repaid well before it would be needed for hospital projects. Moreover, improving housing conditions would also likely reduce future hospital demand, making such an investment not only fiscally sound but socially beneficial.¹²⁴

An editorial published in the '*Cork Examiner*' in November 1938 explained that people lived in an age in which social conditions played an ever-increasing role in the provision of public services. The writer claimed

¹²⁴ *Cork Examiner* 23/9/1938

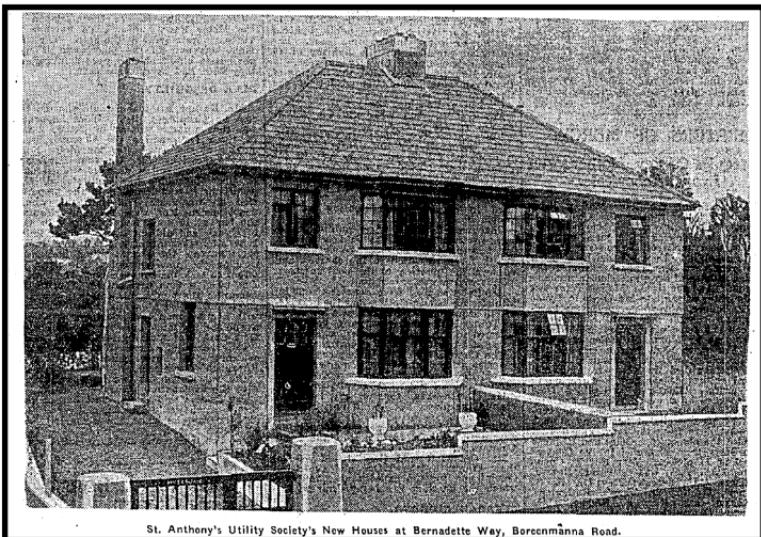
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that Éire, as befitted a Christian nation, had done its part in securing for the working classes and the unemployed the social justice so strongly advocated by successive Popes. From the Dáil down to the most remote urban council in the country, there had been a spirit of wholehearted co-operation and earnest commitment to ensuring that working-class families were provided with modern dwellings and all the amenities of civilised life.

The writer also suggests that nowhere had this solicitude for the welfare of the working classes and the unemployed been more evident than in the major cities. Dublin had raised a veritable new city on the site of what had once been slums. Cork had floated several substantial loans and had allocated the bulk of the funds to the eradication of slum housing. In that year, Limerick had opened the first phase of a new housing scheme projected to cost one million pounds. The writer also notes that similar efforts had been witnessed in towns across the country. Taken together, they suggested, the national Government and the local authorities of the State had made meaningful and sustained attempts to deliver full social justice to the working classes.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ *Cork Examiner* 21/11/1938

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St. Anthony's Utility Society's New Houses at Bernadette Way, Boreenmanna Road.

Semi-detached units from a social housing scheme that had been developed by the St. Anthony's Utility Society, Cork City.

(Source: 'Evening Echo' 5/6/1936)

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STATE OF THE NATION - ESTATE

OF THE CITY, 1939-1942

An editorial published in the '*Evening Echo*' in March 1939, written by a commentator expressing their personal viewpoint, offered a critical reflection on the state of housing provision in Ireland, with a particular focus on Cork City. The writer argued that despite the ongoing, extensive national housing campaign, meaningful and sufficient progress had not yet been achieved in terms of providing suitable housing for those living in unhealthy and slum-like conditions. Drawing attention to Cork City specifically, the writer noted that according to the Cork Corporation, the authority most closely acquainted with the city's housing realities, significant work still needed to be done. The Lord Mayor's remarks describing the current housing need in Cork city as "appalling" were highlighted as serious and deserving of public attention, particularly as they were made following careful consideration.

The editorial acknowledged that in previous years Cork Corporation, alongside other public authorities across the state, had made consistent efforts to deliver housing for those affected by slum conditions. However, the writer stressed that the current pace of progress was inadequate and that further housing schemes would be essential to fully resolve the issue. The piece suggested that other local authorities across Ireland likely found themselves in similarly challenging situations, making this not just a local, but a national concern. While recognising that much had already been accomplished, the writer emphasised that far more remained to be

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done. The article ultimately called for a renewed and more vigorous national response to the housing crisis, suggesting that the issue had not received the level of attention it truly warranted.¹²⁶

A conflict between the provision of housing and other amenities would soon raise its head. At a committee meeting of the Cork Harbour Board/Commissioners, held in May 1939, the suggestion that the Tivoli Scheme be transformed into a playground for children was once again brought forward. Although the idea remained in its most tentative stages, the writer of an editorial in the '*Cork Examiner*' speculated whether it had been inspired by developments along the upper reaches of the River Clyde in Scotland. Those familiar with the Clyde, the writer asserted, would recall not only its busy shipyards, but also the numerous safe and accessible playgrounds that lined its banks, providing children with secure spaces to play.

However, the writer cautioned against Cork's city leaders committing themselves to the construction of a single playground in Tivoli. He argued that the central principle in designing recreational spaces should be proximity to the homes of the greatest number of children, allowing easy access and reducing the risk associated with playing in city streets. A Tivoli-based playground, the article suggested, might serve children from the Lower Road and Grattan Hill areas, but it would offer little benefit to those living on the south side, in the city centre, or on the north side. For these children, especially during the winter months, reaching such a facility after school and dinner would be

¹²⁶ *Evening Echo* 16/3/1939

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impractical, unless, the writer noted wryly, the city Corporation planned to provide free transport, which seemed unlikely.

The editorial highlighted the reality that many children in urban Cork used narrow city streets as 'de facto' playgrounds, often at hours detrimental to their health and wellbeing. It would be unreasonable, the writer said, to expect these children to walk long distances to Tivoli for play. Instead, the writer advocated for the establishment of several smaller playgrounds which were strategically placed in densely populated areas.

A further concern was raised regarding timing. With the city expanding rapidly through both municipal and private housing developments, available land for such amenities was diminishing. The writer warned that delays in planning and implementation could result in the loss of potential playground sites altogether, urging swift and thoughtful action from the Corporation. These views were clearly presented as the writer's personal opinion, reflecting a broader concern for child welfare and urban planning in Cork City at that period in time.¹²⁷

In May 1930, it was outlined how, Fr. Richard J. Dalton, C.C. at SS. Peter and Paul's in Cork city centre, wrote a heartfelt letter to the '*Cork Examiner*' in 1928, highlighting the appalling housing conditions in the 'Marsh,' a densely populated and deprived area of the city. His appeal for action struck a chord, particularly with one anonymous local businessman, who reached out immediately. Within an hour of meeting, the

¹²⁷ *Cork Examiner* 18/5/1939

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foundations of the Marsh Building Society, Ltd. were laid. Though the need was vast, with over 500 families and some 2,000 individuals in the Marsh requiring better housing, the Society resolved to start small. They decided to build eight well-designed houses near Gillabbey Rock, adjacent to Fernhurst Avenue. Each home included a combined living room and kitchen, scullery, three bedrooms, and front and rear gardens. This was regarded as an enormous improvement over the prevailing slum conditions. Fr. Dalton claimed that:

“There are those who scoff, saying eight houses are insignificant, but we believe doing something is better than doing nothing. We’ll have taken eight families out of slums, and given them real homes.”

Initially intending to build flats, the Society quickly realised individual houses were both more cost-effective and more hygienic. Despite the limited scale, they moved fast, by hiring architects, sourcing a site, and securing funding. Crucially, the Society had committed to taking no profit from the project. All income from the low, uneconomic rents (about 6 shillings a week) was to be reinvested into a fund for future developments. The Government provided a grant covering two-ninths of the cost, with one-ninth contributed by Cork Corporation. That left roughly £2,500 to be raised by public appeal, and the response was nothing short of extraordinary. Within two weeks, most of the money had been donated. One generous (and anonymous) donor gave £1,000, another £500, and many more gave what they could. Additional funds were raised through concerts and bazaars. Fr. Dalton and the Society also praised the Cork Corporation and City Manager for their continued efforts, while also

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acknowledging that the scale of the housing crisis required “a new technique” to provide suitable housing quickly, and at an appropriate scale.¹²⁸

In the June 1939 edition of ‘*The Cork Co-Operator*,’ edited by former Labour TD and Councillor, Mr. T Quill, he penned a feature article on the banking system and national finance in relation to housing. In the article, he stated that:

“Most people are aware that the Cork Corporation only secured about £140,000 when they publicly sought a loan of £250,000 for a Housing Scheme recently. The Corporation endeavoured to get money at par for 4 percent per annum. In other words, they would guarantee £100 to be returned for each £100 invested, and in the meantime guarantee £4 per year interest on it. The people with the money to invest thought they should get it at £98 at 4 percent. That is, they claimed that they ought to deposit £98 only and be assured of £100 eventually, together with the 4 percent interest each year. The final result is, the loan is left £100,000 short, though another loan was doubly subscribed a few years ago at the figure of £98. Getting the loan at £98 would mean the Corporation providing another £5,000 for the investors. This sum would, of course, be tacked on to the rents, and when spread over some years and interest accrued on it, it would mean over £10,000 on to the rents.

The following is a concrete example of what interest is costing working people in Cork. A scheme of about 150 new houses was carried through by the Corporation in

¹²⁸ *Evening Echo* 30/5/1939

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Turners Cross district abut 1930. In a particular type of house, the Corporation sold outright to the tenant who had money for a total sum of £375. If purchased by instalments of 10/- weekly, which amounts to £26 yearly, the tenant would become owner in 31 years. By that time, he would have paid £806 for it. In the meantime, he pays the £1 annual ground rent and does all repairs just as if he bought it outright. This really means that the purchasing tenant will pay the original £375 and in addition, £431 for interest. Interest is more than the price of the house!

Explained more simply, the tenant buys his house at 10/- weekly, of which sum 4/8 is repaying the purchase price, and 5/4 weekly is paying interest on the balance due by him. Surely everybody can agree that a position like this needs serious consideration. It is well known that many such people in new houses are compelled to deny themselves proper food and clothing to meet those rents, where 5/4 of 10/- is going to pay interest.

Yet, it is found necessary to give many such people Home Assistance and Unemployment Assistance raised by way of rates and taxes to meet these rents. The same people, themselves, even have to pay high rates on these houses and to pay high taxes on the food and clothing to grant themselves Home Help or Unemployment Assistance. Was there ever such a circle? The Cork Corporation has paid about £90,000 in interest alone during the past 5 years. It will be agreed that this is a very big factor in determining our rates.

Turning to national expenditure, we find that £2.25 million is paid annually in respect of interest on loans and borrowed money. This represents an expenditure of

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1/5 of every £ raised in taxation. Yet, the whole cost to the State of Unemployment Insurance, Unemployment Assistance, Relief Schemes, and Allotments, is only about £1.75 million, or about 1/- of every £ raised in taxation. High and all as the cost might be considered of maintaining Dáil, Seanad, Civil Service and all general offices pertaining to Central Government administration, it is only equal to 1/5 in the £ of taxation, or the same as the amount required to meet interest on national borrowing

In addition to the huge burdens which are being carried by the people, to meet interest and money costs, and which are responsible for high rents, we now see that in every pound of sugar, every ounce of tobacco every penny paid in taxes, on food, on clothes, on amusements, and every bus drive, for there is a big petrol tax, we cough up our pennies, which comes to a huge figure every year, to pay tribute to the unseen power and authority of money.”¹²⁹

In late June 1939, during the official opening of the modest non-profit housing scheme constructed by the Marsh Building Society at Gilabbey Park, Cork city, Mr. Seán T. O'Kelly, Minister for Local Government, emphasised the vital role private citizens can play in addressing Ireland's housing crisis. Speaking after opening eight houses built by the Marsh Building Society, he described the project as a “good Christian work” and urged public-minded individuals to support such efforts. The houses, blessed by Canon Cohalan and spearheaded by the Rev. Richard J. Dalton, represented a private, non-profit initiative to house

¹²⁹ *The Cork Co-Operator - June 1939*

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families who could afford only moderate rents. Fr. Dalton addressed concerns that the Society's efforts were too small in scale to be meaningful. He argued instead that taking any action was better than doing nothing, especially when the scheme, though limited to eight houses, would rescue some 60 people from slum conditions. He also highlighted that any surplus from rents would also be reinvested in maintaining and expanding the scheme, not taken as profit.

In his address, Mr. O'Kelly, who had travelled from Dublin for the occasion, noted that while governments and local authorities were expected to take on the bulk of housing responsibility, initiatives by private citizens were equally vital. He praised the public spirit shown by the Cork city-based group, pointing out that they were helping to alleviate a national issue often left solely to state institutions. The Minister explicitly called on the press to report that he had come "to call the attention of all well-intentioned citizens" to the need for their participation in this cause. He appealed to those with even modest means to contribute, affirming that their support would benefit both the community and their own values. This event was also notable for the support of local government, as the Cork Corporation had contributed funding to the scheme, and the Lord Mayor, Councillor J. Hickey, pledged continued co-operation. Mr. O'Kelly's department had facilitated the project with financial support and administrative assistance. Among those present at the ceremony were civic, religious, and business leaders from Cork, as well as members of the Marsh Building Society and representatives from local industry. Following the event,

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Mr. O'Kelly and local officials toured other housing developments in the city.¹³⁰

In July 1939, addressing the Council of the Cork Corporation, the Lord Mayor, being Councillor Mr. Hickey, delivered an impassioned public statement highlighting the appalling housing conditions endured by thousands of citizens, mainly due to a lack of accommodation. He expressed that while the issue was a national concern, he could not remain silent or indifferent, being acutely aware of the physical and mental suffering experienced by the people. He emphasised the severe consequences of overcrowding, recalling a house with 87 occupants and another with 12 families—61 individuals—sharing a single sanitary facility. He described harrowing scenes of families of five, six, or even eight living in one small room, with no space for proper treatment during illness, and dampness and filth making life a constant misery.

The Lord Mayor stated that if he were to publish the heartbreaking letters he received daily from mothers pleading for housing for their children, it might compel all concerned to act with greater urgency. He stressed the desperate need for approximately 3,000 additional homes in Cork city, and noted that the Corporation already had a site and plans ready for the construction of 200 houses at Greenmount, which had been delayed due to a lack of available funding. He appealed directly to the investing public, including banks, insurance companies, and citizens, to contribute the outstanding £90,000 required, offering a return of 4.5 per cent—an attractive and safe investment. He assured the public

¹³⁰ *Cork Examiner* 27/6/1939

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that Cork city' housing schemes had not cost ratepayers a single penny and that, over the past five years, housing income had exceeded expenditure by £16,000. He urged that this preventable hardship and suffering be alleviated through collective effort and financial support.

Alderman Mr. Allen supported the Lord Mayor's appeal, stating that the responsibility lay with the people of Cork city and the local financial institutions to invest in the Corporation's loan. He asserted that no better investment existed than property and questioned why people sought foreign investments that might collapse when a secure and beneficial option was available locally. Alderman Mr. Desmond believed that the Corporation had made a mistake in how it launched the loan. Had it been floated at 4.5 or 5 per cent from the beginning, he claimed, the funding would have been secured easily. Mr. Hurley supported the Lord Mayor's position, insisting the housing crisis had not been exaggerated. He stressed that the investing public, particularly in Cork city, had a duty to resolve the dire conditions, which were well known to charities and clergy alike. He maintained that the terms of the loan were fair and just, and the Corporation had acted responsibly. Councillor Mr. D. G. Buckley also endorsed the Lord Mayor's remarks, citing specific examples of dire housing conditions he had personally witnessed. Alderman Anthony agreed entirely with the Lord Mayor and lamented the loan's failure to attract investors. He suggested the loan needed an additional incentive to appeal to the public, even though the security was sound. He believed negative statements, both within and outside the chamber, had influenced public perception. He then recounted a case of severe

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hardship caused by the lack of housing and unemployment and stated that every Council member could easily find tenants for the 200 proposed houses based on the volume of applications. Councillor Mr. Furlong added that the city's development had been hindered by the loan's failure to fill. Councillor Mr. MacSwiney reflected on previous discussions, stating that before the "so-called September crisis," the Lord Mayor had proposed issuing the loan at 4.5 per cent at par. However, they had been advised this would not attract investment and were told to issue at 96 instead. When the international situation worsened, they were later cautioned to wait. Later, as the crisis eased, different terms were suggested again, leading to confusion. He believed that there had never been a strong push behind the loan and suspected political interference. The fact that contributors to previous loans had refrained from subscribing this time raised suspicion. He urged financial experts to determine what actually constituted a reasonable return for a secure Irish municipal investment.¹³¹

As per a city council meeting in October 1939, the Housing Committee had recommended that the Corporation proceed with the completion of the housing schemes currently under consideration. They further advised that the matter of securing the necessary funds at reasonable rates of interest be referred to the central Government. Additionally, they proposed that the full implementation of the Cork County Borough Housing Orders, Nos. 1 and 2 of

¹³¹ *Cork Examiner* 26/7/1939

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1939, be deferred, pending a review of the situation in three months.¹³²

At the turn of November, the Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland's conference was held in City Hall, Cork. The Lord Mayor of Cork, Labour's Councillor J. Hickey TD, was elected as president of the association.

During the conference, a proposal to nationalise the housing problem was advanced through motions submitted by the Bray and New Ross Urban District Councils. The Bray motion asserted that, as housing was unquestionably a national issue, it should be managed directly by a Government Department. It contended that any financial burdens or deficits, remaining even after housing subsidies had been applied, should not fall on local ratepayers, but should instead be met from the Central Fund. Specifically, in schemes involving the rehousing of slum dwellers, the motion recommended that subsidies should also be drawn from the Central Fund. These should be calculated after determining an economic rent, subtracting the affordable rent to be paid by slum dwellers, with the resulting loss reimbursed to local authorities annually. The motion further proposed that, for all new housing projects, the interest on loans raised from the Local Loans Fund should be deferred until the third year. This would acknowledge the reality that such schemes typically did not begin to generate income until two years after the loan was issued.

¹³² *Evening Echo* 25/10/1939

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This motion was proposed by Mr. G. Byrne (Bray), seconded by Mr. Harry (New Ross), and supported by Senator T. V. Honan (Ennis). However, it faced opposition from Senator Healy. In his response, Senator Healy pointed to the considerable progress made in Dublin in housing slum dwellers, noting the substantial investments already committed. He expressed concern that nationalising the housing issue might deprive the Dublin Corporation of a vital future revenue stream from rents collected on newly built flats and cottages. Healy drew a parallel with a previous instance involving an electricity scheme. Dublin had invested heavily in the hope of significant financial return, only to have the scheme later appropriated—an experience he suggested they were reluctant to repeat. The implication was that local authorities should retain control and benefit from the fruits of their investment, rather than transferring ownership or profit potential to central authorities.¹³³

At a December 1939 meeting of Cork Corporation, the Housing Committee had recommended that the Department of Local Government and Public Health be urged to expedite the examination of the plans for the proposed Greenmount housing scheme. This recommendation followed discussions held with representatives of the Cork Area Joint Council of the Building Industry, during which the matter of proceeding with further Corporation housing schemes had been considered. The Committee sought an early advertisement for tenders for the work in question. Councillor Mr. McCarthy-Morrogh BL expressed his reluctance to support the scheme, citing the city Corporation's reports, which, in his view, indicated no

¹³³ *Cork Examiner* 1/11/1939

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clear necessity for further housing at that time. Councillor Mr. Horgan explained that the issue had arisen because a site had been selected for a proposed new Fever Hospital, situated at such an elevated location that it could not be adequately serviced by the existing reservoir. The City Manager noted that the matter was not urgent, as the relevant meeting had taken place only twenty-four hours prior. He suggested that there was no need for immediate discussion. Alderman Mr. Anthony inquired about the number of houses included in the Greenmount scheme, to which the City Manager replied that it comprised 206 units. The report was ultimately adopted.¹³⁴

At the December 1939 meeting of the Cork branch of the Industrial Development Association (IDA), one of the committee members, Mr. Ryan, in discussing the position of local employment, expressed the hope that there would be no slowdown in the progress of housing schemes. He stated that the building trade could be regarded as a key industry, as it reflected the broader levels of employment across other forms of industry and trade. He warned that if the Second World War was to continue for an extended period, there was a danger that building construction might decelerate. Mr. Ryan emphasised that a setback to the building industry should be avoided at all costs and suggested that the Government be urged to extend the current subsidies available for housing schemes.¹³⁵

In the New Year of 1940, Mr. Philip Monahan, being the Cork City Manager, gave evidence before the

¹³⁴ *Cork Examiner* 13/12/1939

¹³⁵ *Evening Echo* 18/6/1939

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Dublin Housing Commission at City Hall, Dublin. He stated that public opinion no longer supported denying municipal housing to consistently employed, industrious workers, and therefore housing needed to be provided for both that group and for the chronically unemployed. He stressed the need for a dual housing policy catering separately to each group. Monahan argued that public rent subsidies should be based primarily on the level of need, which was not a constant factor. While industrial conditions were temporarily poor, due in part to political unrest, he believed they would improve. As such, rental assistance should be considered temporary. Furthermore, even in stable times, families' financial situations fluctuated, and to keep families housed, rent levels needed to be regularly adjusted. Initially, it seemed that setting lower rents for certain housing schemes might suffice, but it was deemed unreasonable to expect tenants to change homes every 12 to 18 months. Therefore, the Cork Corporation decided to make rents variable according to each household's circumstances.

In Cork city, Mr. Monahan explained, the scheme provided that rent was generally one-sixth of the family's total income, with special consideration for large families or those with invalid members. The scheme had been in place for four years without causing administrative issues. At that time, Cork Corporation managed 2,473 houses, of which 1,003 operated under differential rent agreements. The annual rental income totalled £50,856, and the scheme was run by a housing superintendent, a chief clerk, a junior clerk, and six rent collectors. The highest household income under the differential rent scheme was £4 12s. 6d. per week, with the corresponding rent being 15s. per week. The

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lowest income was 18s. per week, for which the rent charged was 2s. 6d.

In response to questions from the Commission's Chairman, Mr. M. P. Colivet, Monahan noted that the Corporation initially set a minimum rent of 2s. 6d. and a higher rent of 8s. per week for non-clearance area tenants. This was based on a one-third subsidy on loan charges. In hindsight, he felt these figures were too low. The Corporation earned no net income from the lowest rents, which barely covered rates and taxes. More recently, the minimum rent had increased to 3s. 6d., and the upper rent limit was trending towards the economic cost of the house, independent of subsidy, being up to 18s. in the later months of 1939.

Monahan also expressed worry that allowing better-paid workers into municipal housing could undermine private builders. When asked whether fraud or abuse was an issue, he replied that it existed only to a minimal degree, comparable to that in unemployment assistance systems. He added that the differential rent system had not required additional housing staff, and he supported its extension to all Corporation houses. However, existing tenant agreements prevented the Corporation from raising rent above the agreed maximum. Rents were based on total weekly household income.

On the topic of sub-letting, it was not a major issue, asserted Monahan, because people only did so out of necessity, and rents were calibrated to minimise such needs. Quarterly rent reviews revealed any increases in income, leading to corresponding rent increases. This was deemed possible due to the Corporation's detailed knowledge of families' ages, earning potential, and the

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overall circumstances, information gathered through the close relationship between rent collectors and tenants. Provisions were also made for those in casual employment. He acknowledged that this system placed considerable responsibility on collectors, and believed they should bear even more social responsibility. Simply rehousing a family was not enough; support was needed to help families develop a social awareness in line with their improved surroundings. Monahan also stressed that:

“Unless you can get reliable collectors capable of doing this, I believe the scheme will fail.”

He also expressed interest in experimenting with female collectors, proposing that a woman be assigned to each city section for three months to assess whether they might be more effective in supporting the city's social development. Mr. Monahan also said that he might ultimately support a balanced gender approach.¹³⁶

During a January 1940 committee meeting of the Cork Workers' Council, a complaint was raised regarding the delay in the Greenmount Housing Scheme. Mr. Barry noted that, prior to Christmas, members of the Building Group had been informed that there was no obstacle preventing the scheme from proceeding. It therefore came as a great surprise when it was later revealed at a subsequent Cork Corporation meeting that a disagreement had arisen between technical personnel in the cities of Cork and Dublin. This development, he said, was particularly disappointing, as assurances had been given that construction would soon

¹³⁶ Cork Examiner 4/1/1940

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begin, and the reason for the hold-up was unclear. Mr. Barry understood that while the layout of the scheme had been ratified, the associated sewage scheme had not received approval, resulting in the entire project being delayed until the issue was resolved. He expressed frustration, emphasising that such a delay was deeply discouraging, especially given the high levels of unemployment in Cork's building industry, and asserted that whoever was responsible for the delay deserved to be strongly criticised.

Councillor Mr. C. Connolly added that the news came as a major shock to city councillors on the Corporation when the City Manager informed them that the housing plans had not yet been approved. He pointed out that the council's Housing Committee had already approved the plans the previous March, and when questioned about the delay in submitting them to Dublin, the City Manager had responded that there was no point in seeking approval when the necessary funding was not available. Mr. Connolly argued that if there was no intention of sending the plans due to a lack of funds, then why prepare them at all, and conversely, if funding was available, why not proceed immediately? Councillor Mr. J. Hurley, T.D., stated that the Lord Mayor had inquired into the matter during a recent visit to Dublin, and it appeared that the issue had now been resolved. He expressed hope that the delay would not last as long as originally feared, especially as the Department was eager to tackle unemployment by fast-tracking the housing scheme.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ *Evening Echo* 19/1/1940

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The rates estimates prepared by the City Accountant for submission at the upcoming Cork Corporation Council meeting, for the year 1941, showed an increase of £11,000. This rise was attributed primarily to higher loan repayments resulting from the financing of the Greenmount and Assumption Road housing schemes. It was noted that the revenue generated from the Greenmount houses during the current year would fall significantly short of the associated capital repayment costs, as the houses would not be under rent for the full year.¹³⁸

At an April 1940 meeting of the South Cork Board of Public Assistance, the Rev. Fr. Aherne, C.C., of Clogheen, appeared before the Board accompanied by a deputation to support a motion proposed by County Councillor Mr. Martin Corry TD (Fianna Fáil). The motion called for the construction of ten houses in Clogheen under the Non-Municipal Housing Scheme, to replace existing unfit dwellings. County Councillor Mr. Brook W. Brasier TD (Fine Gael) seconded the motion. Fr. Aherne stated that no new houses had been built in the Kerry Pike Road area since the end of the Great War, and that there was now a severe shortage of housing in the locality. He appealed to the Board to give the matter serious and sympathetic consideration.

The Secretary then read a letter from Muintir na Tire, St. Mary's Guild, which also highlighted the urgent need for housing in the area. The Chairman noted that most of the residents in question worked at the Blarney Mills and that the area was situated quite close to Cork City (as the boundary then stood in 1940). He

¹³⁸ *Cork Examiner* 5/2/1941

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questioned whether these individuals could be classified as rural workers. Mr. Corry asserted that the mill workers in Blarney certainly counted as rural workers, and added that there was a need for between 20 and 25 houses in the area. Fr. Aherne clarified that the proposed site lay at the far end of the Blarney Road.

Mr. Councillor Jeremiah Hurley, T.D. (Labour), also spoke in support of the motion. He emphasised that the area in question fell within the Board's jurisdiction and not that of Cork Corporation. He warned that without the Board's intervention, no progress could be made. He urged the Board to heed the testimonies of Fr. Aherne and the local doctor, and gave his assurance that the local T.D.s would do all in their power to secure any available subsidies for the proposed housing. County Councillor Mr. Lucey raised the matter of whether tenants would be expected to pay an economic rent, given the proximity of the site to the city. It was understood that rents would be fixed accordingly, and the Board ultimately agreed to the proposal.

A notice of motion had stood in the name of Mr. M. Corry, proposing that the rents set by the Board for non-municipal houses should be reviewed with a view to determining a more equitable charge based on tenants' ability to pay. In relation to this motion, the Minister for Local Government and Public Health had written to the Board, stating that he had given careful consideration to the rents fixed by the South Cork Board of Public Health for the non-municipal housing schemes currently being implemented. Referring to the Secretary's statement dated the 7th of the previous month, the Minister noted that rents ranged from 3s. 6d. to 8s. per week, plus rates. It was observed that the

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3s. 6d. rent was intended for 144 cottages under construction in the vicinity of Cork City.

However, the Minister had expressed concern over the 8s. rent, which he deemed excessive as it exceeded the economic rent. Accordingly, he could not approve of such a charge. Similar concerns were raised regarding rents of 6s. for cottages in Carrigrohane and 5s. for cottages in Tower and Crosshaven. The Minister emphasised that tenants should not be required to pay inflated rents that partially offset losses incurred elsewhere in the scheme. He urged the Board to implement a more reasonable and fair rent scale.

When moving his motion, Mr. Corry insisted that many tenants were being charged rents they simply could not afford. He argued it was unjust to have relocated these individuals from homes with manageable rents into new dwellings with rents disproportionate to their income. Mr. Brasier seconded the motion. He maintained that rent levels ought to be determined based on each tenant's income and proposed the formation of a special committee comprising the Chairman of the Board, the Medical Officer of Health, the Engineer, and the Secretary. This committee, he suggested, should assess each case individually and set rents accordingly. He believed this proposal should be presented to the Minister, and expressed confidence that the Minister would not oppose it.¹³⁹

In connection with the proposed housing scheme at Greenmount, the City Manager had requested the Cork Corporation, at its meeting in May 1940, for

¹³⁹ *Cork Examiner* 30/4/1940

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authority to borrow the sum of £100,000. The City Manager's report stated:

"The approval of the Council is requested for the borrowing, by way of overdraft on the Housing Capital Account, of the sum of £100,000 from the Council's treasurers, the Munster and Leinster Bank. Interest will be paid on the overdraft at one-half per cent under the Irish bank rate from time to time, with a minimum of four per cent. The money is required to finance the building of 210 houses at Greenmount until it becomes possible to raise the capital required on more favourable terms."

On the motion of Mr. C. Connolly, seconded by Mr. D. G. Buckley, the Corporation granted the requested authority. Alderman J. Allen inquired about the identity of the contractor for the scheme. The City Manager replied that the matter was currently before the Department for sanction, and no announcement could be made until that sanction had been obtained. The meeting was presided over by Mr. T. Quill.¹⁴⁰

At a meeting of the Cork Corporation held in June 1940, presided over by the Lord Mayor, Councillor Mr. J. Hickey, T.D., a report was presented by the City Manager seeking approval to borrow £120,000 at a fixed rate of interest in place of the borrowing previously authorised at an earlier meeting, in order to finance the Greenmount housing scheme. The report explained that although authority had recently been granted to borrow £100,000 on overdraft, the Minister for Local Government and Public Health had since

¹⁴⁰ Cork Examiner 29/5/1940

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advised that it would be more prudent to secure the necessary funds at a fixed rate of interest for a set period. Accordingly, the City Manager requested permission to borrow £120,000 from the Local Loans Fund, or from any alternative source offering more favourable terms. The members of the Corporation unanimously agreed to the request.¹⁴¹

At a July 1940 full-meeting of the city council, correspondence received had included a letter from the Minister for Industry and Commerce, regarding the pertinent issue of unemployment assistance payments to individuals who had been relocated from slum clearance dwellings within the Cork County Borough (Cork City) to new housing schemes situated outside the borough's boundaries. The letter was similar in content to one previously addressed to Mr. Dowdall, T.D., which had already been read at an earlier meeting of the city Corporation. The Minister suggested that one potential solution to the issue would be the extension of the county borough boundaries to include such newly built dwellings. In response to a query from Mr. Hickey, the City Manager explained that a preliminary report from the town planner was not expected until approximately the following March. He noted that the town planner was making regular visits to the city in preparation for the report. Regarding the proposed extension of the borough, the City Manager remarked that it was an artificial measure in the context of unemployment assistance, which, as the Corporation had pointed out, ought to be determined by where individuals worked rather than where they lived. However, until legislative changes were made, it was

¹⁴¹ *Cork Examiner* 12/6/1940

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asserted that no immediate action could be taken. He added that this same issue was being encountered across the country. Mr. Hickey further observed that the-then current boundaries of Cork County Borough were unusually restricted, and noted by comparison that Macroom Urban District Council, for example, had possessed a wider administrative area.¹⁴²

In September 1940, it was announced that a total of 210 houses were planned for construction under the Cork Corporation's housing scheme at Greenmount, situated on land acquired from the Presentation Brothers, on the southern side of the city. Work had already commenced, with the foundations and rising walls of 70 houses under construction and roadworks simultaneously in progress. Over 90 men were employed on the house-building contract, which was awarded to The Modern House Construction Co., while an additional 50 men were engaged in road-laying. The houses were of the typical two-storey, city Corporation design, comprising a kitchen, three bedrooms, a bathroom, scullery, and hot and cold water installations. It was anticipated that a significant portion of these homes would contribute to alleviating the slum clearance challenges on the city's southern side. Progress on slum clearance had previously been delayed due to difficulties in acquiring suitable land for new housing developments. The construction contract for the Greenmount social housing units was expected to take approximately 15 to 18 months to complete. Simultaneously, another 70 houses were under construction on the Assumption Road scheme, which had been taken over by the Corporation from the St.

¹⁴² *Evening Echo* 24/7/1940

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Joseph's Utility Society. Around 80 men were working on this site, and the completion of the houses was projected to occur within roughly three months. Already, 157 houses on this scheme had been built and let to the tenants. However, contracts for the roads and water mains for the remaining 70 houses had not yet been awarded. At that point, the total number of completed and occupied social houses under the Corporation's housing programme stood at 2,771, with rents ranging from 2s. 6d. to 18s. per week, depending on the size and type of dwelling.¹⁴³

At the November 1940 full-meeting of the Cork Corporation, the City Manager, Mr. P. Monahan, stated that, under the Lord Mayor's privilege, that he wished to seek authority to borrow an additional £20,000 by way of overdraft from the Corporation's treasurers. This request was made to facilitate the financing of the Greenmount housing scheme, due to an unexpected delay in finalising the mortgage with the Hospitals' Trust, which had agreed to advance the capital for the scheme. Mr. Monahan expressed confidence that there would be no objection to the request. On the motion of Mr. Horgan, seconded by Mr. J. M. Buckley, the city Corporation granted the necessary authorisation.¹⁴⁴

At the meeting of the Cork Corporation in January 1941, with the Lord Mayor (Alderman W. Desmond - also a TD) presiding, the following resolution was passed unanimously:

¹⁴³ *Evening Echo* 2/9/1940

¹⁴⁴ *Cork Examiner* 27/11/1940

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*"That, in accordance with the resolution passed at the Council meeting on 11th June, 1910, which authorised the City Manager to borrow £120,000 from the Local Loans Fund, or any other source offering more favourable terms, for the purpose of financing the Greenmount Housing Scheme, and in accordance with the letter of sanction from the Minister for Local Government and Public Health dated 16th July, 1940, the sum of £120,000 be borrowed from the Hospitals Trust Board under the terms specified in the letter of sanction. Furthermore, the repayment of this sum, with interest at a rate of 5% per annum, shall be secured through a mortgage on the rates and funds which the Corporation is authorised to use for securing repayment of money borrowed under the Housing of the Working Classes Acts, 1890 to 1919."*¹⁴⁵

The Lord Mayor (Alderman W. Desmond) presided over a meeting of the General Purposes Committee of the Cork Corporation held in April 1941. In response to a concern raised by Mr. B. G. Buckley regarding the hardship faced by blind individuals moved from slum areas to locations outside the city, who were excluded from participating in the city Corporation's blind pension scheme, the City Manager explained that the Corporation could only administer the existing law, not create it. He stated, "We can't help it, the law is there, and we have to operate within it." He also noted that the County Council was in the process of preparing a scheme to address the issue. The City Manager informed Mr. Connolly that the Housing Scheme had been submitted to the Minister for Local Government and Public Health for approval. Mr. D. G. Buckley

¹⁴⁵ Cork Examiner 29/1/1941

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inquired about the commencement of the air raid shelter elections, to which the City Manager responded that they had already begun. Mr. Buckley acknowledged this with a simple "Oh, that's different."

In relation to the Allotments Scheme, Mr. Quill asked whether sufficient land was available for all applicants. The City Manager confirmed that there was enough land for those who had applied on time but expressed concern for late applicants, stating that they might not be able to secure land. Mr. Quill asked how many people were affected, and the City Manager estimated about 150 individuals. Mr. Quill suggested that an effort should be made to accommodate these late applicants. The City Manager explained that while efforts could have been made to provide land if they had applied on time, the machinery for the compulsory acquisition of land was slow and would likely be too late for those applicants. Mr. Hurley lamented that people willing to cultivate plots were being excluded due to a technicality, noting that it was still possible to plant potatoes, which would be valuable by the end of the year. The City Manager agreed that if suitable land could be found, they would be willing to take it. He emphasised that the issue was due to the late applications, despite ample public notice being given. Mr. Connolly then asked if efforts would be made to secure land, to which the City Manager confirmed in the affirmative.¹⁴⁶

In May 1941, Mr. W. T. Cosgrave, Fine Gael T.D. for Cork City (and former President of the Free State Executive Council), paid a visit to his constituency and

¹⁴⁶ *Cork Examiner* 9/4/1941

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spent Saturday morning touring various allotment schemes in the suburbs. His early start allowed him a firsthand view of the efforts being made by Cork's unemployed and others involved in cultivating land to support themselves and their families in anticipation of potential food shortages. He was accompanied by the City Manager, Mr. P. Monahan, and departed from the Victoria Hotel shortly after 10 a.m. Their first stop was Mayfield, where Mr. Cosgrave inspected a large area under cultivation. He expressed admiration for the excellent work being done and was particularly struck by the thoughtful layout of the plots and the wide variety of foodstuffs that were being grown. He commended the unemployed for making full use of the Corporation's scheme, which aimed to help people prepare for the difficult winter ahead. Following this, he visited Spangle Hill, then Gurranabraher, and continued to express his appreciation at each location for the quality of the cultivated land and the dedication shown by the workers. At the Fair Grounds along Carrigrohane Road, Mr. Cosgrave was especially moved by the industriousness on display. He engaged in conversation with the men working the plots, using spades, shovels, rakes, and hoes, and noted their practical and creative approach to growing their own food. One man proudly showed him a bag of last season's potatoes, remarking on the richness of the soil and their ability to save seed for future planting. Later, at Pouladuff, Mr. Cosgrave saw something regarded as more unique: in addition to cultivated plots, the men had constructed a recreation hut from materials previously used at the Agricultural Fair Grounds. The City Manager had provided the materials, which the men repurposed and rebuilt themselves. Mr. Cosgrave expressed his admiration for their initiative and the

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quality of the new structure, noting how it provided a welcoming space for discussion and camaraderie, far removed from the bustle of city life. Mr. Monahan also showed him last year's prize-winning plots and informed him that over one hundred men were engaged in Pouladuff alone. On his return to the city centre, he viewed the Greenmount Housing Scheme, another initiative that he publicly praised.¹⁴⁷

In July 1941, a letter to the editor of the '*Evening Echo*', was sent, written by the City Manager, in response to a report that had appeared in the newspaper regarding a discussion in Dáil Éireann about the topic of the Housing (Amendment) Bill of 1940. The letter addressed supposed inaccuracies and mistaken beliefs in the newspaper's report, specifically concerning a statement attributed to Deputy J. Hickey. The City Manager began by addressing the report that suggested there had been a lack of care in dealing with housing schemes in Cork City. The report's headline, he claimed had implied this issue, drawing attention to a statement by Deputy Hickey, which claimed that twelve months prior, a building society had received a £10,000 grant and a £3,000 loan from the Corporation to start a scheme of 56 houses. The City Manager clarified that the statement made by Deputy Hickey had been misleading and did not reflect the facts as they stood. He acknowledged that Deputy Hickey might have been mistaken but refrained from labelling the statement as malicious due to his "personal knowledge" of the city councillor and Labour TD. He then corrected the details of the case: the grant provided to the society in question had been £1,170, not £10,000, and it had

¹⁴⁷ *Cork Examiner* 12/5/1941

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been for 18 houses that had nearly been completed, along with 24 other houses that had been roofed and floored. The total scheme had consisted of 70 houses, and at no point had the Corporation issued a loan of £3,000 to any public utility society. The City Manager concluded by stating that he had been unable to find any figures in Deputy Hickey's report that were correct and urged the public to consider the facts carefully.¹⁴⁸

The keys to the new homes in the Cork Corporation Building Scheme at Greenmount were handed over to the first group of tenants in August 1941. It was hoped that before another week had passed, another group of houses would be ready for possession. The scheme comprised 210 modern houses, each featuring three bedrooms, a kitchen, living room, bathroom, scullery, and outhouses, with gardens at both the front and rear. Approximately thirty families, primarily from the Fuller's Lane district and other condemned houses in the city, moved into their new homes. The following week, a further group of 22 houses were to be handed over. Each house was equipped with hot and cold water. The site for the scheme was regarded as being ideally located, overlooking the city, and close to the Greenmount Industrial School. The roads in the neighbourhood were named after several Brothers of the Presentation Order. The scheme had been in progress for approximately thirteen months, and it was also anticipated that the entire project would be completed within the next few months.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ *Evening Echo* 5/7/1941

¹⁴⁹ *Evening Echo* 30/8/1941

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In December 1941, a strongly worded editorial appeared in the '*Cork Examiner*.' In the piece, the writer questioned the practicality of a war-time Coal Order, and how it would affect those housed in the city. The writer of this editorial strongly asserted that the Department of Supplies, and, by extension, other government departments, did not appear to consult those with direct, practical knowledge of trade or an understanding of local geography when issuing regulations. It was the writer's opinion that this failure to engage with experienced voices had been evident in the most recent Coal Order that year. According to the writer, if such consultation had taken place, the officials responsible might have better understood that the County Borough of Cork (Cork City) was a relatively small administrative area, surrounded by densely populated suburbs. The writer claimed that, at several locations, the boundary between city and county was so thin that it was almost meaningless, so much so that, in one instance, the dividing line allegedly ran through a terrace of houses, possibly even through a single house. The editorial further argued that the lack of available space within the city had led to most new housing developments being located just outside its limits, in what was technically county land. However, the writer insisted that these areas functioned as urban spaces in every practical sense, and were home to people who identified as city residents.

The writer maintained that, under the new Order, a household on one side of a road might have been eligible to purchase coal, while a neighbour just across the street had to depend on turf, a situation the writer believed was unfair and illogical. In the writer's view, both sets of residents lived equally far from turf bogs

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and equally close to coal suppliers, making such a distinction arbitrary and unjustifiable. It was the opinion of the editorialist that this kind of supposedly rigid bureaucratic rule-making, which ignored local practical realities, undermined public trust and created unnecessary hardship. The writer concluded by asserting that the Order should have been urgently reviewed and amended to reflect the real-life geography and needs of Cork city's population.

At the January 1942 assembly of the Cork region of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), at which delegates to the Cork Trades' Union (Workers') Council were nominated, it was proposed that the Minister for Education be requested to exercise the powers granted to him under Section 9, Sub-section 1, of the School Attendance Act, 1926, in order to revise the division of Éire (Saorstát Éireann) into school attendance areas. The intention was to enable the inclusion, within the jurisdiction of the School Attendance Committees of specified County Boroughs and Urban Districts listed in the Schedule to the Act, of housing schemes and residential areas that were usually contiguous to those Boroughs and Districts. It was asserted that, in the opinion of the relevant School Attendance Committees, these adjoining areas ought to be brought under their jurisdiction, for the purpose of more effective oversight and administration.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ *Cork Examiner* 27/1/1942

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The opening ceremony for the Gilabbey Park social housing scheme, constructed by the Marsh Building Society.

(Source: 'Cork Examiner' 27/6/1939)

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A picture of a section of Cork Corporation's Greenmount social housing scheme, following its inhabitation by its first group of tenants

(Source: 'Cork Examiner' 5/9/1941)

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CONCLUSION

The history of slum clearance and social housing schemes carried out by resourceful bodies such as Cork Corporation and non-profit utility societies between 1922 and 1942 in particular provides an insightful and often under-appreciated view of the challenges and successes in early 20th-century housing development in Ireland. While the history of social housing in major urban centres like Greater London or Manchester has been well-documented, Cork City remains a less explored subject in housing studies. The book fills this gap, offering a valuable examination of how a combination of civic leadership, social activism, and broader societal consensus laid the foundation for social housing policy in the growing city. Based largely on contemporary newspaper reports, it sheds light on how various sectors of society, such as local government, trade unions, the Catholic Church, and commercial interests had all collaborated to address housing needs at a time when urban poverty and inadequate living conditions were widespread.

In the wake of Ireland's limited independence, the newly-formed government's commitment to social housing was often fragile, constrained by financial limitations and political difficulties. Yet in Cork City, there emerged a remarkable degree of consensus between diverse interest groups, an alliance that helped secure the realisation of ambitious housing schemes. The Cork Corporation's plans for slum clearance and housing development were not simply the result of top-down governance but reflected a broad-based, collective recognition that social housing was essential for the public good. This co-operation was unusual in its

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breadth and unity; it is rare today to see such a convergence of interests in housing policy.

The political, social, and religious landscape of Cork City in the 1920s and 1930s allowed for this consensus. The Cork Corporation was aligned with trade unions that advocated for the improvement of working-class conditions. At the same time, the Catholic Church, an institution with significant influence in Irish life, saw social housing provision as a moral imperative, helping to foster a sense of civic duty among its parishioners and leaders. Commercial interests, which might typically have been seen as opposing such schemes, recognised the importance of a stable, well-housed workforce for the long-term prosperity of the city. Thus, Cork City was fortunate in the degree to which different groups recognised the necessity of social housing. This is a balance of power that is less commonly seen today, where commercial interests, political activity, and broader economic forces often work against the expansion of social housing. The early 20th century was a period of great transformation in Ireland, and this spirit of collaboration in Cork City reflected an optimism for the future. The experience of Cork Corporation in working alongside these different entities provides a distinct contrast to other urban centres where fragmented, contentious debates often delayed or stymied housing reform. Cork's relatively harmonious approach to social housing stands as a reminder of what can be achieved when disparate social, religious, and political forces come together around a common cause, even if that unity was largely confined to this time and place.

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The text is not only valuable for its chronicling of these housing initiatives but also for what it reveals about the complexities of implementing public housing in a developing urban context. While Cork Corporation did not always have the resources or expertise to implement its ambitious plans without setbacks, it laid the groundwork for future housing policy that would influence later generations. Despite many of the schemes being less than ideal, the projects undertaken by Cork Corporation, in co-operation with non-profit societies, managed to alleviate some of the worst urban poverty, offering new homes to thousands of families who had lived in unsanitary and overcrowded conditions. Still, the book does not shy away from the fact that the quality of construction often fell short of expectations, with poorly built houses that failed to meet the standards of the time, thus undermining some of the long-term benefits of these housing initiatives.

In many respects, the story of these early housing projects in Cork City mirrors the struggles faced in contemporary Ireland. Today, Ireland is again grappling with a housing crisis marked by skyrocketing rents, insufficient affordable housing, and a growing population that is outpacing the construction of new homes. While the scale of the problem has expanded and the challenges are more complex, the underlying issues remain strikingly similar: the growing reliance on the private sector to meet the housing needs of the population, limited political will to invest significantly in social housing, and the social stigma that still surrounds lower-income housing. In this way, the experiences of Cork City in the interwar years can serve as a historical lens through which we can better understand the

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structural forces that continue to shape housing policy today.

A key point of comparison between the social housing initiatives in Cork City during this period and the present-day housing crisis is the question of who should bear the responsibility for providing affordable housing. In the 1920s and 1930s, Cork Corporation and non-profit utility societies were at the forefront of addressing the need for public housing, often with the backing of a broad social coalition. Today, the responsibility for solving the housing crisis is more fractured. Private developers, government agencies, and non-profit organisations all have roles to play, but it is rare for them to collaborate in the same way that they did in Cork City at that time. This has led to a fragmented policy landscape, where competing priorities and ideologies often hinder the development of effective, large-scale solutions.

The history of social housing in Cork City is particularly poignant when viewed in the context of today's housing policy. Unlike many other cities in the early 20th century, Cork City was able to overcome political fragmentation and ensure that social housing was viewed not only as a necessity for the urban poor but also as a civic duty that benefited society as a whole. The book reminds us that when there is a concerted effort from multiple sectors, be they public, private, or religious, it is clear that significant strides can be made in tackling housing inequality. But it also highlights the challenges of sustaining this approach, particularly in times of economic difficulty or political fragmentation.

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In examining the story of Cork's social housing development, the book invites readers to reflect on the continuing lessons that can be drawn from history. One of the most striking lessons is the importance of political will and the role of local government in driving housing reform. Cork Corporation, though constrained by resources, was willing to take bold steps to address the city's housing crisis. Today, local authorities, once again, hold the key to solving the housing crisis, but their ability to effect real change is often limited by the national government's policies and the prevailing dominance of the private housing market.

Moreover, the text underscores the importance of quality in social housing. The inadequacies of some of the homes built in Cork City in the 1920s and 1930s should also serve as a cautionary tale to today's policymakers. The drive to provide housing must not just focus on the quantity of new homes but on ensuring that these homes are well-constructed, affordable, and sustainable. While the urgency of the current housing crisis is undeniable, we must also ensure that the housing being built today does not fall into the same traps of underdeveloped infrastructure or poor construction that plagued early 20th-century schemes.

Equally, the broader social purpose of housing remains a critical consideration. In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a deep belief that improving the physical conditions of housing would also lead to much social improvement. This view, though more advanced today, still underpins contemporary debates on housing policy. Social housing is not just about providing shelter but about creating communities where people can thrive.

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This concept, which formed the basis of the social housing schemes in Cork City, remains as relevant today as it was then.

To close, the history of slum clearance and social housing schemes in Cork City from 1922 to 1942 provides invaluable insights into how a combination of local government, trade unions, religious institutions, and commercial interests can work together to address pressing social issues. While these efforts were imperfect, they laid the foundation for modern housing policies in Ireland. Today, as Ireland faces another prolonged housing crisis, the experiences of Cork City during this period offer lessons in collaboration, political will, and the long-term vision needed to build a society where adequate, affordable housing is a fundamental right and core component of human dignity. The remarkable coalition formed in Cork City, though specific to its time, holds valuable lessons for contemporary housing policy, reminding us that the provision of housing is not just about building homes, rather, it is about building a fairer, more equitable society.

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HOUSING A FREE STATE CITY, 1922-1942



CORK, CITY OF

'Homes by the Lee: Housing a Free State City, 1922–1942' explores a transformative yet under-examined chapter in Irish urban history. Focusing on two decades of slum clearance and housing development in Cork City, this compelling study reveals how an unusual alliance of local government, trade unions, the Catholic Church, and commercial interests united to address a growing housing crisis. At a time when Ireland's new state was still finding its feet, Cork Corporation and non-profit utility societies spearheaded ambitious housing schemes that offered thousands of working-class families a path out of poverty.

Drawing from contemporary newspaper accounts, the book uncovers the political, social, and moral imperatives that drove early social housing efforts in Cork city – efforts that were as fraught with challenges as they were fuelled by hope. Though many of the houses built were far from perfect, the city's collaborative approach contrasts sharply with the fragmented housing policies of today.

A valuable contribution to Irish social history, *'Homes by the Lee'* not only chronicles the built environment, but offers timely reflections on the enduring struggle for affordable, high-quality housing. It is a powerful reminder that, when different sectors of society come together with purpose and conviction, lasting progress is possible.



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